

Script for Sermon for Sunday 23rd May at Stukeley Meadow Primary School.

Reading Acts 9:32-35.

Charlie puts 2 chairs out and a table in the middle. *Charlie:* Let's *pray*.

Welcome to "Meet the Bible Characters". And today we are going to meet 3 friends today reading from Acts 9. (Penelope, Annika and Isaac come on stage. Annika comes wearing her name badge, she takes a seat on the left hand chair, she's holding onto a rollmat. Penelope comes on stage wearing her name badge, she takes a seat on the right hand chair holding her embroidery, Peter is wearing Roman dress- eg a sheet wrapped as a toga).

First of all will you welcome **Aeneas**. (Round of applause). We'll come back Aeneas shortly in the first half.

Secondly will you welcome **Dorcus** (Round of applause). We'll meet Dorcas shortly in the second half.

And third will you welcome **Peter** (Round of applause). Peter, it's great to have you with us on meet the Bible characters today. As a fisherman turned disciple, you feature in quite a lot of the Bible, the gospels, your own letters, and today in the book of Acts, which we are looking at.

How would you sum up your life?

Isaac: Well Charlie it's been full of ups and downs. I had the privilege of knowing Jesus and being one of his closest disciples. I was with him on the Mount of Transfiguration when his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light. But I also got it very wrong. There was the time that Jesus said "Get behind me Satan" when I wanted a Christ without a Cross, and then that terrible time that I denied him three times just before he was killed.

But I know that he forgave you after his resurrection, and reinstated you three times, saying "feed my sheep".

Yes he is so kind and forgiving. He's the Lord of second chances.

I guess that since Jesus left and went up to heaven, it's all been pretty quiet?

No not at all. You see that's the story of the book of Acts, and that's what we need to learn today. **Jesus is still at work**. Let me repeat: **Jesus is still at work**.

Luke wrote his first book to show what Jesus *began* to do and teach, and the second book Acts to show all that Jesus is *continuing* to do by his Spirit through his Word. Jesus is still at work. And he's still at work in your day, 2021.

Tell me about those days in the book of Acts.

Sure... I'd be glad to do that. Well, we had the coming of the Holy Spirit, which I think you guys are remembering today at Pentecost, and God gave us boldness to share the good news around Jerusalem and Judea. I had the privilege of standing up and speaking on the day of Pentecost, and thousands of people became believers.

But it wasn't all easy was it?

No, not at all, there were amazing healings and the word spread, but soon there were difficult times. Satan was at work and the church nearly went off the rails three times. **First** there were bad things going on in the church.

Was that Ananias and Sapphira lying to the Holy Spirit?

Exactly. And **second** there was the drama with the widows.

You mean the apostles getting distracted from preaching the Word by all the practicalities?

Yes. And **3rd** there was a massive persecution.

That must have been hard, did it stop the church growing?

No persecution normally grows the church. The gospel spread throughout Samaria. Mainly through Philip. And that brings us to our story today.

OK, great, well thanks Peter, if you don't mind stepping to one side for a moment, Cordie is going to come and read the first half for us.

READING FROM ACTS 9:32-35- CORDIE DU TOIT

So can you tell me more about that day?

I was out and about strengthening the Christians.

Got it - that's verse 32. "As Peter travelled about the country, he went to visit the Lord's people who lived in Lydda". Where's Lydda?

I've got a map actually- it's not that far from Jerusalem. The gospel had gone from Jerusalem, to Judea, and actually right up as far as Galilee, which of course is where I came from and where I first met Jesus.

But here's Lydda. You'll find it on Google maps called "Lod" today. It's just outside Tel Aviv. What we used to call Joppa or Jaffa.

Wow is that where Jaffa cakes come from?

Not really, the oranges that they use, Jaffa oranges, are named after it, but the Jaffa cakes are made in Stockport, Manchester in the McVitie factory.

OK, sorry about that. Do carry on.

Where was I? er... Lydda...(looking around)- yes Aeneas and Dorcas.

Let me tell you about Aeneas.

(Goes over to Aeneas= Annika, who lies on the table, acting paralysed).

There was this man called **Aeneas**. He'd been in bed for 8 years.

Sounds relaxing?

No, he was paralysed.

Oh sorry. What did you do?

Well I just spoke to him, and Jesus healed him.

What did you say?

I said "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and roll up your mat".

And what happened?

Well Aeneas will show you.

(Aeneas gets up and rolls up his mat and goes to sit on the chair) .

Wow that's amazing. Are you sure it wasn't just a trick?

No, seriously, everyone in the area knew Aeneas, and when they saw him walking around, nearly the whole neighbourhood became Christians.

Does that story remind you of anyone? A paralysed man picking up his mat?

It does. [Asking the church...] I wonder if anyone here can remember another paralysed man that got healed...?

[Hopefully one of the kids or adults in the congregation remember Jesus healing the paralysed man who the friends brought on a mat and made a hole in the roof to lower him down (Matt 9, Mark 2, Luke 5). There were actually other examples in the gospels, eg Matt 8, John 5)]

Yes, up in Capernaum, where I come from, Jesus healed a paralysed man. He actually did it a couple of other times too. And like in Jesus' time on earth, God used it to bring people to know more about him. So Jesus was still at work in Lydda, even when he was up in heaven!

What do you think we can learn from that part 1 for our little church here in Huntingdon?

Well Like I said at the start. Jesus is still at work. Here's the first lesson.

1) Jesus is still at work bringing people to himself. (see powerpoint).

When you say Jesus is still at work, are you saying that we should expect paralysed men to walk here in Huntingdon?

Possibly, but actually these kind of miracles are quite rare even in the Bible, and even if God doesn't choose to use amazing miracles, Jesus is still at work organising events to get people to come to him, like those people living in Lydda. You are going to hear from Rod shortly, and he'll share his story.

OK so Jesus is still at work bringing people to himself today. That's really encouraging, and I guess as a church that is focusing on our hopes and dreams, that's a really important thing to bear in mind.

Yes be encouraged. We couldn't see Jesus in Lydda, but he was still at work, and loads of people became Christians.

OK now there's a second story, with Dorcas. She's been sitting very patiently over here, can we move onto her story?

Sure. but why don't we sing first?

OK good idea, why don't we sing, Our God is a Great Big God- seems appropriate!

OUR GOD IS A GREAT BIG GOD- with actions. Whitts move to their seats.

Welcome back.... well it's a real privilege to have Peter with us today. I've never met anyone who knew Jesus, and who was there involved in these amazing stories in the early church. It's amazing.

Peter can I ask... Was that story about Aeneas being healed really true? Did it really happen?

Yes absolutely. In fact it gets even more amazing in the next part of the story.

OK well let's have the second half read to us now, thanks Cordie...

READING FROM ACTS 9:36-43- CORDIE DU TOIT

OK Let's have this acted out also.

Let's have Dorcas lying on the table too. (Dorcas gets up and lies on the table)

Is she paralysed too?

No she's dead.

Oh, I'm sorry.

Yes let me explain. This lady is called Dorcas or Tabitha.

Why does she have 2 names?

Well both names mean Gazelle, one of those speedy mountain antelopes. Tabitha is Aramaic, my language. Dorcas is Greek.

Anyway, the name doesn't matter. The thing is, she was an incredible lady. She was always helping the poor. Particularly the widows.

There wasn't any money from the government, so if people didn't have a husband or family, they didn't have any money. How could they buy clothing or bedding? Well Dorcas made it for them out of her own kindness. And she was doing this over there in nearby Joppa, when I was in Lydda.

Well here's the amazing thing. At just the right moment I was a few miles away in Lydda, the disciples needed my help in nearby Joppa.

Coincidence right?

Well, I don't believe in coincidences.... I think Jesus was at work getting me where he wanted me.... Remember, **Jesus is still at work.**

So what happened?

I went with these guys to Joppa, to where Dorcas had been laid in an upper room.

Hang on, why an upper room, is that where they normally put dead bodies?

No, it's not normal, but twice in the old testament in the time of Elijah and Elisha there was a dead body in an upper room that came back to life. So I think the guys already had an idea what was coming.

What did you do?

Well I went up there. And there's crying, and there's wailing. Everyone was devastated that Dorcas had died. Especially the widows who she had been helping.

What happened next?

Let me show you. I sent everyone out of the room, and I prayed to Jesus. (turning towards Tabitha who is lying still on the table) And I turned towards Dorcas, or Tabitha, and I said "**Tabitha Koum**".

Sorry? I don't speak Aramaic.

It means "Tabitha, get up"

"**Tabitha Koum**" That rings a bell from somewhere. What happened?

She opened her eyes (Annika opens her eyes).

Huh? Hang on, Aeneas, do you see that? (pointing to her eyes)- she's alive! Wow Peter you are amazing.

No it wasn't me- it was Jesus. I was praying to him!

And then what?

I gave her my hand and helped her up. (He helps her up, she goes back to her chair and carries on sewing).

That's amazing. Giving her a hand and helping her up. That also rings a bell.

Yes Jesus did exactly this with Jairus' daughter when he raised her from the dead.

Oh, we've got that in our Bible in Luke 8. Jesus held her by the hand, and he said "Talitha Koum", you held her by the hand and said "Tabitha Koum". Do you think it's deliberate that it was so similar?

Maybe, maybe not, but the point is Jesus was at work the first time, Jesus was at work the second time. They were both raised from the dead by Jesus.

What happened to Dorcas.... I mean I've got so many questions. Did she sell her story or make a website? Did she turn it into a Hollywood film?

Well no, she just kept on making clothes for people.

The really important thing is what happened next. v42 "This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord".

It's amazing. The good news is spreading. So what's the lesson for us in our little church here in Huntingdon.

Well I think it's the same as the first point, but slightly different. **Point 1) Jesus is still at work point bringing people to himself.** We see that in Lydda and Joppa. But secondly. 2) **Jesus is still at work getting his people exactly where he wants them.**

God got me to the right place. To **Lydda** so Aeneas could be healed; Lydda is near to **Joppa**, so Dorcas could be raised. Joppa is near to **Caesarea** so that Cornelius could be saved.

Who's Cornelius?

Well you'll have to tune in next week on zoom.

But you see, you as a church are trying to figure out your next steps for outreach, and that's a great thing. But maybe you don't need to overanalyse it too much. God has got a plan. Stay faithful to him. Keep praying, keep talking about the good news. He'll have you in just the right place at the right time. He doesn't make mistakes, he organises everything perfectly. You'll hear that in Rod's story later in the service too.

But remember these things. Jesus is still at work, 1) bringing people to himself, and 2) getting his people exactly where he wants them. He doesn't make mistakes.

Thanks Peter, it's been great to have you with us. I hope we can get you back again sometime. Would you like to lead us in prayer?

Sure.... Dear Heavenly Father, I pray for Christ Church Huntingdon. Please help us to remember that Jesus is still at work, bringing people to himself, and getting his people exactly where he wants them. May this encourage the adults and the children to be brave and bold sharing the good news this week, knowing that Jesus is still at work. Amen.

Amen.

Thanks Peter, and Aeneas and Dorcas.

Back to Jon.