

30 Days of Acts

The Acts of the Apostle's inspire our faith and practice to live into a new way, following the risen Christ and embracing people from other nations, races, cultures and societies. The Acts of the Apostle's is a book of adventure, wonder, miracles, daring escapes, jail breaks, shipwrecks, and stories of faith. This is the story of the early church and how we grew as a people of The Way to the spread of Christianity throughout the known world. We are reading the Book of Acts, one chapter a day, for the month of June. To accompany this reading I invite you to join me in a group called 30 Days of Acts.

As disciples we join together connecting through sacred tasks and prayer practices as we pursue Jesus in holiness of heart and holiness of life through devotion, worship, compassion and justice. Consider how the Holy Spirit who gave birth and life to the church gives us life through sustaining practices that shape and form us more fully into the imago deo – image of God.

Each day for the next thirty days you are invited to taste and see different spiritual practices and sacred tasks that encourage and deepen your prayer life and community of faith. Long ago, as individuals received the Holy Spirit, so the church was born. Today, individuals continue living in the Spirit's light and power to encourage, build up, grow and witness the love of God through the church. These daily sacred tasks and prayer practices create room where Christ can invite us to feast with him at his table of abundance. Discover what God has waiting for you for the next 30 Days of Acts.

Pursing Jesus through Holiness of Heart

Devotion

June 1 | Breath

...the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. (Genesis 2:7)

Today sit quietly and gently breathe in and out, in and out, listening to your breath and feeling the warm air as you expel your breath. Fill your lungs to capacity and let your breath out slowly. Offer your breath back to God and give thanks for the gift of life-giving breath.

June 2 | Spiritual Thirst

As the deer pants for steams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? (Psalm 42:1-2)

Today when you are thirsty, journal how you feel physically. What is it like to have your mouth dry? Pray for those who live without clean water for drinking or cooking. Remember the mothers who bath their children in mud puddles and who walk for miles for drinking water. Journal on what you imagine life might be like for you without clean and safe water. Consider taking a case of water to a food pantry or CAC food pantry.

June 3 | Spiritual Hunger

Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty." (John 6:35)

Today fast from food for several hours or all day if you are so inclined. Feel the rumble and hunger in your belly. Remember the children who go to bed hungry every night and wake up without food in the mornings. Pray for parents who struggle to put food on the table. Journal what it is like for you to be hungry, not just ready for a meal. Journal on how you understand the physical results of being hungry and thirsty and the spiritual need to be filled. Consider taking beans and rice or other shelf stable food to a local food pantry or CAC food pantry

June 4 | Listen

Then Samuel said, "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening." (1 Samuel 3:10)

Today, sit in stillness and silence, quieting your body and allowing your thoughts to settle. When busy thoughts interrupt your silence invite them to come back another time. Breathe in and out and as you breathe in and out, filling your lungs, give thanks for this time with God. Invite God's Holy Spirit to speak to you in a way you can understand. Listen openly without agenda or fear. Journal on what you experienced and what you discovered in the silence.

June 5 | Sight

Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything – all she had to live on." (Mark 12:41-44)

Today read this text. Reflect on a word or phrase that strikes you. Read the text again. Where is Jesus and what do you notice about him? What do you notice about the poor widow? What does this text tell you about how Jesus sees people? What word does Jesus have for you today? Imagine sitting with Jesus and being one of the disciples listening to Jesus teaching about his observation. Journal on what Jesus is saying to you this week. I hear Jesus saying to me....

June 6 | Sabbath Rest

So then, a sabbath rest still remains for the people of God.... (Hebrews 4:9)

Today rest. Set aside chores that can wait or activities that deplete your soul. Fill your body and soul with good things today. Sleep, play with friends, families or pets, take a leisurely walk or ride or visit a museum. Celebrate the day as a gift from the Lord.

Worship

June 7 | Pay Attention

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, breaking of bread and the prayers. (Acts 2:42)

Today pay attention to the scripture readings from Acts 11 in our Bible Reading Plan. What word does this chapter have for you in your life? Consider connecting with others, sharing a meal and conversation that encourages, builds up and edifies others.

June 8 | Stillness

...he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. (Psalm 23: 2b-3a)

Today acknowledge the noise that fills every moment and find a space and time in which you can be quiet and still, breathe deeply and take the time to ponder, reflect and imagine paying attention to the love in the community of all creation. Feel the beat of your heart and give thanks. Worship God as you breathe in and out giving thanks for the moment.

June 9 | Gratitude

O give thanks to the LORD for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever. (Psalm 118:1)

Today give thanks to God in all you do. Be grateful in each circumstance of the day, for each person you have contact with, for your living space, your health, your food and ordinary matters that fill your day. In your journal write about ten people, places or things for which you are grateful, right now.

June 10 | Prayer

Jesus said, "Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial but rescue us from the evil one." (Matthew 6:9-13)

Today slowly pray the Lord's Prayer and consider how this prayer offers wonderful insight into worship. Often referred to as the Model Prayer, it shows us that not only is prayer an act of worship, but the Lord's Prayer also is a prayer of worship, incorporating five themes of worship: *"Our Father (Abba) which art in heaven, Hallowed (Hallelujah) be thy name. your kingdom come (Maranatha). Your will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial but deliver us from evil (Hosanna).*

June 11 | Worship in Another Context

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. (Luke 4:16)

Today, remember Jesus worshiped as was his custom. He participated in the worship life of the congregation and sets an example for us today. Consider going online and experiencing worship in a different setting than you are used to. If you attend a Modern Worship Service, find another worship service that is very Traditional, perhaps even from another faith community or denomination or religion. If you are a Traditional Worshiper, consider going online and visiting a worship service with high energy, different music and instruments and pattern of worship than you experience on Sunday morning. Worship is not for Sunday only and is not just United Methodist!

June 12 | Sing

But I will sing of your strength, in the morning I will sing of your love; for you are my fortress, my refuge in times of trouble. (Psalm 59:16)

Today sing to the Lord! Sing with joy! Look up hymns and spiritual songs online or in your hymnal and just sing. Don't worry about how you might sound – it does not matter to God, for your voice, singing in praise and worship, is beautiful. Sing.

June 13 | Sabbath Rest

You shall keep my sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary; I am the Lord. (Leviticus 26:2)

Today we gather in the sanctuary for worship: for prayer, for song, for gratitude, for offering, for proclamation of the Word, for fellowship, for confession, for forgiveness, for reconciliation, for renewal. Today come and worship with the community of faith and join the assembly of those seeking the goodness of God. Experience God's love in praise and thanksgiving,

Compassion

June 14 | Presence

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep. (John 11:33-35)

Today reach out to another person and be present to them. Be with them physically, emotionally and spiritually, through a phone call or Face Time, through your physical presence – be with them. Keep your attention fully upon the other person listening to their words, watching their body language and hearing what they do not say.

June 15 | Comfort

The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. (Psalm 34:18)

Today offer comfort to someone who is in the hospital, nursing home, home bound or who is suffering or in grief. Call them on the phone, send a card and note, be a listening ear and offer whatever they may need for comfort.

June 16 | Prayer

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (I Thessalonians 5:16-18)

Today offer yourself and your family compassion. Rejoice in the events of the day, pray continually and give thanks for all circumstances – even those circumstances that are difficult and seem impossible. Trust in God's provision and compassion.

June 17 | Listening

Let each of you not look to your own interests, but to the interests of others. (Philippians 2:4)

Today be a listening ear to someone who is afraid, lost or confused. Listen and don't try to change or fix them. Listen with the ear of the heart to their fears and concerns without judgement, interrupting or telling them what to do or trying to make them see your way. Just offer compassion through intentional listening.

June 18 | Healing

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.

(2 Corinthians 4:8)

Today be aware of those who need healing in body, mind and spirit. Pray for them as the Holy Spirit leads you without judgement or agenda. Pray for those who long for compassionate care and loving kindness. Be compassionate care and loving kindness today and an agent of healing and God's grace through a touch, your voice, your presence.

June 19 | Forgiveness

"... and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you." (Ephesians 4:32)

Today offer forgiveness for slights, hurts, or terrible events as you are able. Begin with prayer and journaling about the person or event. Lift the circumstance up to God for healing and reconciliation as you are able. Take small steps and ask the Holy Spirit to heal you from within so you may forgive. Forgiving can heal you from your heartbreak and wounds, but it does not erase what happened. Forgive yourself and then you can forgive others. Offer compassion through forgiveness.

June 20 | Sabbath Rest

So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation. (Genesis 2:3)

Today remember how you are blessed and bless others as you offer compassion and love through rest and leisure. In your journal write about all the ways God has blessed you.

Justice

June 21 | Humility

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8)

Today practice humility. Look at the other side of an issue that bothers you with an open mind and heart. Respond with kindness to someone who is grumpy or difficult. Listen quietly to someone you disagree without trying to justify your point. Today, try to live into the words from the prophet Micah.

June 22 | Hospitality

... for I was hungry, and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me... And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

(Matthew 25:35,40)

Today spend some time reading and exploring why people flee their home countries and risk everything to come to our shores. Set aside judgements and what you think you know and read or listen to their stories. Be open to why people come in desperation without documentation,

risking their lives for a new life. Pray for the children separated from their families. Even in disagreement sit in silence and listen to the Holy Spirit without agenda or judgement.

June 23 | Differences

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28)

Today read an article or a book by an author of another race. Be open to their point of view and hearing what they say without defensiveness or judgements. What one thing did you learn about another race that you did not know? What did you learn about yourself? What might relations between the races be like if we really believed and lived in our unity through Christ Jesus?

June 24 | Poverty

The righteous know the rights of the poor; the wicked have no such understanding. (Proverbs 29:7)

Today give a gift to the ID Ministry at Community Assistance Center (CAC), or prayerfully consider how you may serve God through this ministry or other ministries who come alongside those in poverty. Family Promise, Habitat for Humanity, Keep Us Fed, Conroe House of Prayer (CHOP), Yes to Youth. Call Rev. Janet Stilwell and allow her to guide you. 936-756-3395 or jstilwell@fmconroe.org. Consider how you may be a voice for those living in poverty.

June 25 | Oppression

Thus says the Lord: Act with justice and righteousness and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place. (Jeremiah 22:3)

Today explore the topic of oppression and journal on what you find. In what ways and where do you see oppression going on in the world around you? How will you live out your baptismal vow of accepting the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves, seriously?

June 26 | Giving Voice

... learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. (Isaiah 1:17)

Today learn how to be an advocate for those who have no voice – all people in poverty, children, the alien, persons without documentation, those with no address, no ID, no work, people caught in addictions, domestic violence and abuse, those who cannot read or write, children caught in the judicial systems, those who are abandoned and vulnerable persons with disabilities. In what ways might you be a voice for the voiceless? How is God leading you to pray, to act, to move?

June 27 | Sabbath Rest

How much more valuable is a human being than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the sabbath.” Then he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and it was restored, as sound as the other. (Matthew 12:12-13)

Today do good to others. Heal, love, restore, rejoice, listen, give, hope, encourage, bless and nurture others in every way you can. Honor God's goodness, grace and love by extending goodness, grace and love to others.

June 28 | Reflection

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. (Philippians 4:8)

Today reflect on the readings from the last month and or on the prayer practices and sacred tasks. What did you learn about yourself this month? What might you continue to explore further? Where do you see God working in you or through you now?

June 29 | Release

Do not remember the former things or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. (Isaiah 43:18-19)

Today release old anger, discontent or anxiety. Write in your journal those things that consume you and that you would like to overcome so that you might move forward. Tear out the page tear the page in small pieces and place in the garbage can. Give thanks to God for healing and restoration.

June 30 | Taste and See

O taste and see that the LORD is good; happy are those who take refuge in him. (Psalm 34:8)

Today taste the goodness of God through all your senses and give praise to the goodness of God and God's love for us. Allow sweetness to come from your soul and be shared with all you meet. Invite someone to share a meal with you and consider the savory taste of joyful fellowship. Confess bitterness and put aside a sour spirit as you journal. Rejoice, give praise and sing.