

Cell Notes Acts of the Apostles June 28th 2009 Acts 8. 1 - 25

Read **Acts ch 8. 1 - 25** The story opens with a wave of persecution, sparked off by the martyrdom of Stephen. The persecution is not described in detail, but it is bad enough to scatter the new believers all over Judea and Samaria. However, they just carry on preaching the word. The action focuses in on the work of Philip, apparently on his own, among the Samaritans. His ministry of preaching the Christ accompanied by miracles of healing and deliverance is so impressive that even the local sorcerer responds. maybe because he cannot resist the 'joy' that is released in the city(vs 8)?

People often reject Christianity because they say that religion causes wars.

What answer would you give to that accusation? Can this passage help you to give a better answer?

Yes. Religion doesn't cause wars. It is human fear, hatred, cruelty, greed pride, unwillingness to forgive that causes wars. However, it is true that religion often provides the excuse and the pretext. Maybe that is why Jesus was so critical of what we call 'religion'. In fact, he had very harsh things to say about people who use religion as a cloak for their own wickedness. What we see here is the power of Jesus to heal and overcome hatreds and prejudices that go back centuries (Jews vs Samaritans) through the faithful and courageous witness of Philip. People who really love Jesus and want to serve in the kingdom he has come to establish, find the inner strength to leap over cultural barriers and bring the love of God into places of fear and hatred.

One thing the Samaritans had going for them was that they were already a community, with a God-given *identity* and *destiny*. The problem in our fragmented society is not tribal and clan hatreds, but that we have all but lost that sense of identity and destiny that comes from belonging to a community ... instead we have widespread loneliness and isolation of modern urban living. We have become so used to this inner emptiness. We think it is normal. God wants to turn St.Simon's into a *village centre*, a *family home*, somewhere where people can come to rediscover identity and destiny in a community formed and shaped by God in Jesus.

We need the power of God to rebuild Community. We need to let God rebuild Community so that the power of God can be fully experienced among us. The Church building is destined to be a powerful tool and focus for rebuilding Community. What do you think?