

28th April – Dangerous Faith – A Scattered Church – Acts 8:1-13

And Saul approved of their killing him.

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.

Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralysed or lame were healed. So there was great joy in that city.

Now for some time a man named Simon had practised sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, 'This man is rightly called the Great Power of God.' They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his sorcery. But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptised, both men and women. Simon himself believed and was baptised. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.

1. Read Acts 8:1-3 in the Amplified Bible. How do these verses emphasise the toll the persecution of the church would have taken on individual believers?
2. What price would the believers have paid in practical and personal terms?
3. What do the answers to these two questions tell us about their faith and their love for Jesus?
4. In addition, the believers 'preached the Good News about Jesus wherever they went.' (New Living Translation) What could they have done instead, and what enabled them to do what they did?
5. How can we take inspiration from these believers, when it comes to sharing our own faith with others?
6. Go to opendoorsuk.org and read World Watch List 2024: Trends – In brief. Read until you get to the blue writing, which says 'View the World Watch List 2024'. How has this opened your eyes to the suffering of our sisters and brothers across the world?
7. Given the answers to the last question, how do you view the freedoms that we enjoy in the UK to practise our faith?
8. Philip's evangelism is accompanied by signs and miracles, which led to 'great joy in that city'. How do we, as a church, and as individuals, bring 'great joy' to our community?

PRAY – Father, help us to be inspired by our persecuted sisters and brothers, to share our faith