



"Each week at Communion we would all stand in a huge ring around the altar."



Sarah Hinlicky Wilson photos

vian. There was an extended Pakistani family. There were so many Nigerians! And so many Malagasy! And other Africans besides, from Ghana and Sierra Leone and Ethiopia and Zimbabwe. Even a handful of other North Americans like us.

And they got it. They knew as well as we did what it meant to be strangers in a strange land. They drew us in with a welcome that said: here, where nobody is at home, we are at home.

That international welcome worked ecumenically, too. Most members had some Anglican connection, but by no means all. Catholics and Baptists found a place at St. Alban's as much as those closer to Anglicanism on the Protestant spectrum. My Lutheran husband eventually became church warden, which we're pretty sure violates some canon law of the Church of England, but no one's going to pick on one of these far-flung outposts of the Diocese of Europe. (Anyway, the Hannover kings were Lutheran.)

But to get back to the point: what does any of this have to do with Acts? Since my earliest years I had been crazy excited to see the world. Other than driving through the most boring patch of Canada between New York and Michigan en route to see my grandparents, I didn't manage to leave the U.S. until I was 16, and my real travel career got launched only with my family's move to Slovakia when I was 17. Over college Christmases and summers home I added to my tally of European nations, and I spent one semester abroad. Andrew had been all over Latin America, with trips to Europe and Africa, too. When the chance arose for us to move to Strasbourg we needed barely ten minutes to say yes, and once we got there we gulped down each new wonderful city or hitherto unvisited country with gusto.

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And yet, despite my 11 years of theological education, it had never once occurred to me that my thirst for foreign lands had the slightest thing to do with God.

If only I had paid better attention to Acts!

As it turns out, it wasn't even the colorful congregation of St. Alban's that sent me back to reread what I regarded as such a disagreeable book. It was my job. As a brand-new

ecumenist, I was charged with the task of figuring out the world's 600 million Pentecostals for the world's 70 million Lutherans. My ignorance shielded me from any debilitating fears about what I was undertaking. Plus, I had the great fortune of making friends with fantastic Pentecostal scholars who gave me valuable pointers. It didn't take too long to realize that if I was ever going to figure out Pentecostalism, I had to figure out Acts first.

So, despite my theologically upturned nose, I plunged into Acts again. I didn't get it. I read it again. I still didn't get it. I was struggling with a particular puzzle: how to make sense of what Pentecostals said about the Holy Spirit and about baptism, and how that fit, or not, with what Luther-

ans (and Anglicans and Roman Catholics and Orthodox) said about the Holy Spirit and baptism.

That, as it turns out, is a-whole-nother story. But a crucial step toward solving the puzzle was to see how the first 19 chapters of Acts fulfill Jesus' command to bear witness "in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The drama centers on the reconciliation of all the peoples estranged from God.

Act One, as we'll call it, kicks off the story with the ingathering of the Jews — no small irony that they had

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