

Today's reading [Acts 7.54 – 8.4](#)

Sticks and stones may break my bones ...

Whilst we acknowledge that this saying has some truth in it, words do hurt! There seems to be a constant plea on social media at the moment to 'be kind' to one another. Of course, Christians want to be kind to one another, don't they?? Unfortunately, from time to time I have been in Church meetings where that doesn't seem to be the case.

So, at the start of this thought, I want to echo that phrase 'be kind'!

However, this passage is about the stones that hurt – the stones that hurt sufficient to kill – to kill Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Stephen's dying words perhaps have an echo of Jesus' words on the Cross "Lord, do not hold this sin against them."

But look at the bit part player here: "the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul." (7.58) "And Saul approved of their killing him." (8.1) "Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison" (8.3)

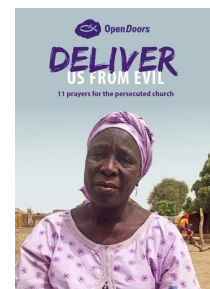
Is the same Saul who, just a short while later, is the greatest Church planter in the history of the Christian church? Could it be? Could it possibly be him?

Here is the start of the great persecution of the Christian church in Jerusalem, with the consequent scattering of all except the apostle throughout Judea and "those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. The intention is the persecution of Christians and the destruction of the Church; the result is the exact opposite – the gospel is preached wherever they went, and the church moves into a growth phase.

[Just a thought, en passant, could it be that one of the reasons that the church is not currently growing in most parts of the western world is that we are too comfortable and complacent?]

Across the world today there are places where people are being tortured and killed for their Christian faith and it's appropriate, from time to time, to remind ourselves of that fact and to pray with them.

There is an International Day of Prayer for the persecuted church, but it's in mid-December and tends to get lost in the run up to Christmas, but Open Doors has partnered with Thy Kingdom Come and 24-7 prayer to produce *Deliver us from evil – 11 prayers for the persecuted church*. Perhaps you would like to look at that resource now, before this year's Thy Kingdom Come initiative starts.



to

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