

Scattered — but still connected
Bible readings: Acts 8.4-25; John 14.1-6

*Thomas said to Jesus, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going.
 How can we know the way?' Jesus said: 'I am the Way, the truth and the life.'
 Philip said, 'Lord, show us the Father and we will be satisfied.'
 Jesus said, 'Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.' John 14.5-9*

"The sun never sets upon the empire of the dandelion". I can never decide whether the dandelion is a weed or a wild flower. To the gardener in me, it's a weed — but I find it really hard to treat it with the sternness I reserve for ground elder or couch grass. I just love its boldness, its brightness, its gorgeous cheerful yellowness — and it's great for pollinators. And it's one of nature's most successful broadcasters — the dandelion clock is an amazing propagation mechanism. Just try to uproot it, and pouf! — dandelion seeds scattering in all directions, each one perfectly designed to parachute down to earth and start the process all over again.

That's more or less what happens to the church at this stage in the story of Acts. Saul is doing his best to uproot it from Jerusalem (8.1-4) — but in the process, he succeeds in scattering the seeds in all directions. *Those who were scattered went from place to place, proclaiming the word* (v.4). What looked like a disaster turned out to be just what God has planned all along (look ahead to 11.19 for another bit of fruitful broadcasting). In fact, we're now entering the second phase of the programme Jesus had sketched out before he ascended to heaven: *You will be my witnesses, in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth* (1.8).

So here's Philip the deacon, blown out of his home base by persecution, parachuted down into a Samaritan town (v.5). The apostles are stuck in Jerusalem (v.1), and here he is, isolated and dispersed, in a city full of strangers. Samaria had a name as a hostile environment for Jews (look at John 4, or Luke 9.51-56). Philip might have thought he'd better keep his mouth shut. But these strangers are actually the lost ten tribes of the house of Israel — and they're only too ready to welcome the good news of God's kingdom. Just by being a faithful witness, talking about Jesus, doing what Jesus did, Philip finds that Jesus' story has the same effect on these strangers as Jesus did — wholeness, healing, and joy (vv.6-8). And the result is a new community, baptized with water and the Spirit, scattered — but still connected (vv.12-17).

Today is our patronal festival at St Philip and St James. The Gospel reading for today tells of Philip the apostle (a different Philip!) with the other disciples in the upper room, talking to Jesus just before his death. Jesus knows that they are going to be scattered and dispersed — not a comfortable place to be. Like us, the disciples are crying out for clarity, for some kind of stability: Philip longs for a clear vision (John 14.8), Thomas wants to know the way (John 14.5). Jesus' answer to them is the same as his promise to us: *I am the way, the truth and the life. ... Whoever has seen me has seen the Father*. Hold on to me, and you're in the right place. I'm with you every

step of the way — in fact, I *am* the Way. You may be scattered — but you're still connected.

God bless, Loveday

From a prayer from Iona (Kathy Galloway)

Our brother Jesus, you set our feet upon the way,
and sometimes where you lead we do not like or understand.
Bless us with courage where the way is fraught with dread or danger;
Bless us with graceful meetings where the way is lonely;
Bless us with good companions ... with humour with humility...
Lead us into exile,
Until we find that on the road is where you are,
And where you are is going home.
Bless us, lead us, love us, bring us home, bearing the gospel of life.
Amen.