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**theme:** Shadow Healing (**Acts 5:12-5:16**)

**materials:** Bibles, news story

## welcome

What is the most impressive magic trick you have ever seen? What is the difference between magic and miracles?

Bring in a news item about your neighbourhood, city, country or world that you can discuss with the cell. Where do you see God in this story? Ask other members of cell to bring in stories to discuss in subsequent weeks.

## worship

Where have you seen God this week? Where have you experienced divine community this week?

Read **Luke 8:40-48**.

Do you believe that Jesus' presence still has the power to heal in this world? Pray for one another, and particularly for those you know who are sick, that they will be healed in the name of Jesus.

*If you are in Vancouver, join 614 on Thursday night at 6:30pm for Knee Drill prayer and worship time.*

## word

Read **Luke 9:37-43**, and then **Acts 5:12-16**

Why could the disciples not cast out the demon in the first story (Luke 9), but in Acts even Peter's shadow seemingly has power to heal?

Read **Luke 1:35-38** and **Luke 9:28-36**, noting especially the word "overshadow". The exact same word for overshadow in these passages is used to describe Peter's healing shadow in **Acts 5**. What connection do you think is being made here?

Why is Peter so revered at this point in the story? Is the response to Peter (and his shadow) just superstition? How does this danger relate to the present day?

Why were signs and wonders happening with such regularity amongst the apostles?

Do they happen in your midst in the same way? Why or why not?

Do people often come to your cell or church with their seemingly insurmountable problems, or bring their friends to you with their problems? Do you expect, and even welcome that?

*Should* people be bringing their most desperate, impossible needs to the Church? What should we do, if they do come?

Why were some people refusing to associate with the apostles, and others were joining up?

What do you think the reaction to these healings will be from the authorities?

## witness

Signs and wonders have nothing to do with our own abilities. God performed signs and wonders through the apostles in order to lend confirmation to the bold words they were speaking about the risen Christ. These were signs of the coming of the Kingdom of God, and only God can inaugurate the Kingdom. Our job is not to try and



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bring about signs and wonders, but to preach the message of the Kingdom boldly and faithfully. We meet people in their need (their need for help, healing, deliverance, and most of all salvation) and we point them to the risen Lord, the only one who can bring healing and salvation. Who are you going to point towards Jesus this week?

*If you are in Vancouver, join in with one of 614's outreach ministries such as League of Mercy, Night Vision, or Street Combat.*

When we preach the name of Jesus boldly, some will choose not to associate with us. That is ok. We cannot be afraid to preach the word boldly because it might lose us friends, respectability, or even donations. We have to trust that God's riches will be sufficient for our needs, and for the needs of his mission on earth. Pray with one another for the necessary funds for mission in your area, and remember to participate in this prayer with your own giving.

## action points

Continue reading through the entire books of Luke and Acts with one other person. If the other person is a fellow believer, read them through in a public place, like a café (not yelling it out or anything, just reading it to one another). Make a regular time to come in and read together, and more likely than not someone will eventually ask you what you are reading and why.

If the other person is not a fellow-believer, perhaps choose a less public place to read, but again set regular times, daily if possible, to get together and read the Gospel. You don't have to read it all at once. Read two to three chapters at a time, and then meet another day to read some more.

## leader's guide

This short passage is another "calm before the storm". We have already seen the beginnings of official persecution with the arrest of Peter and John, and the dire threat of internal moral corruption in the story of Ananias and Sapphira. Now the apostles begin meeting regularly at Solomon's Colonnade, the place where the lame man was healed and where the arrests took place. More persecution is on its way, but for the moment we get from Luke another brief description of the state of the young Church (similar to **Acts 2:42-47, 4:32-37**).

It is interesting to read this description in the light of Luke's story in **Luke 9:37-43**. There, a man brings his demon-possessed son to the disciples for deliverance. Jesus is not with them at this point, and the disciples are unable to do anything for the child. When Jesus returns he is frustrated at the "faithless and twisted" generation that was impotent in the face of evil, and casts the unclean spirit out himself. Now the disciples seem to have no difficulty at all with healings and deliverance, with even Peter's shadow exhibiting healing power (similar to the story of the hem of Jesus' robe in **Luke 8**). Why this should be has already been answered by Peter after the lame man was healed: "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? .....His name (Jesus) – by faith in his name – has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all." (**Acts 3:12, 16**).

This point is hammered home in Acts with the description of Peter's shadow. In the story of the angel's announcement to Mary in **Luke 1:35-38**, it is said that Mary will be *overshadowed* by the Most High (the Holy Spirit) and she will become pregnant, though a virgin. Her response is that nothing is impossible with God. In **Luke 9:28-36** we get the story of Jesus' transfiguration on the mountaintop, wherein his glory is revealed, and he is *overshadowed* by a cloud (the Holy Spirit) at which point a voice from heaven once again affirms that he is the Son of God. By using the exact same word for Peter's shadow Luke is indicating that now the very Holy Spirit of God is present and at work in and through his people, this new, tiny, vulnerable Church community. The same



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Spirit that conceived Jesus and revealed his glory on the mountain is now bringing healing to people through one as unlikely as Peter. This presence of the Holy Spirit is the very thing that the people of God have been waiting for and wanting for millennia, and here it is inhabiting the young faith community. Nothing, indeed, is impossible with God.

Peter and the other apostles now understood, and lived out, the reality that in and of themselves they had no power over sickness and unclean spirits, but that the Holy Spirit in them did. They had received the Holy Spirit of God, and as such Jesus was continuing his work on earth through them. Their responsibility was to be faithful and obedient, to declare the message of Jesus boldly. God himself would confirm their words through signs and wonders. But this is the work of God, at the discretion of God, through his Holy Spirit – inspired people. There is no earthly formula that can force God to perform miracles. In the same way, our responsibility as Spirit-inspired followers of Jesus is just that: to follow Jesus. To know him, his teaching, and the power of his death and resurrection. To do the kinds of things that he did, because if Christ lives in us by his Holy Spirit, then Christ is *still doing* these things in the world through us today. It is not our role to try to manufacture signs and wonders. It is our role to proclaim the good news of Jesus with all boldness, to love one another and to act justly and with mercy. We pray with faith for God to bring healing and deliverance, but we leave the actual signs and wonders up to the Holy Spirit. And when they occur, we point everyone back to Jesus, not to ourselves.

Peter and the other apostles did gain quite a local reputation through their preaching and through the signs and wonders, to the extent that people brought their sick and dying out onto the street to be touched by his shadow as he walked past. Others brought the sick and possessed from towns outside of Jerusalem to see the apostles. There certainly does seem to be something of superstition motivating these actions, and the belief that shadows had magical powers (for good or ill) was not uncommon in those days. All the more reason for Peter and the others to consistently deflect all praise and attention away from themselves, and towards the risen Christ by whose power the miracles were actually happening. It is significant that Peter and the others had spent time with Jesus, and were held in some measure of awe for that connection. But the awe should be related to Jesus, not the personality of the apostles. The danger of the “cult of personality” continues to exist today, particularly in relation to “healing and miracle” ministries.

The kind of histrionics and hoopla that go along with many “healing and miracle” ministries today are almost certainly unnecessary. But what is necessary is a desire for the opportunity to act with the Lord’s feet, hands and heart in the world. That is, it is not wrong for people to come to the Church with their most desperate needs. We sometimes feel overwhelmed, inadequate, or simply not interested in dealing with the most pressing problems of people in our neighbourhoods and our world, but part of the very purpose of the Church is to offer hope, love, faith and service into the most desperate and needful situations. This is not simply because it is good to be good, or even because it grants us an opportunity to deliver an evangelical tract. It is because the Church is now the “Jesus with skin on”, the Body through whom the Holy Spirit is reaching out into this world with truth, healing, mercy and love. People who were hurting and desperate flocked to Jesus while he walked the earth. It is no accident that people with the same needs flocked to the new community of Christ-followers when it became evident that they carried within them the same Spirit and seemed to speak and act with the same authority. The same Spirit that was in the early Church is in the Church today.

This means that we should likely expect people to want to join with us. After all, the Holy Spirit is attractive, and Jesus’ salvation is still what we need most desperately. But it also means that others will choose to disassociate with us, as they did with the first Christians. When the apostles went back to Solomon’s Colonnade, “none of the rest dared join them”. This could be a reference to those who had been with them before, but who, after seeing what happened to Ananias and Sapphira, decided that half-hearted commitment to this venture was a pretty dangerous proposition. So it could mean that only those who were fully committed carried on. Or it could mean that while there were some in Jerusalem who were so awed by what the apostles were doing that they had to join up, there were many others who understood which way the wind was blowing and chose to stay well away from these radical disciples of Jesus and the persecution that was sure to come. Either way, there was a significant group that wanted nothing to do with these people who proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus, just as there will be today.