Welcome to Spring Quarter! This quarter we’re finishing up our year-long Bible study by looking at the book of Acts. Believe it or not, our study this year has not been random – we’ve been looking at three different books of the Bible because together they tell one Story, and it’s a story that we can believe and live in with all of our hearts and minds and bodies. It’s a life-changing story, and it is good news (gospel) for the whole world.

During Fall Quarter, we began by rooting ourselves first in the life and message of Jesus, because he is both the beginning-of and the reason-for our Christian community. We learned that the good news that Jesus brought was all about this thing that he called the “kingdom of God,” a new world-order where God is glorified and all creation blessed and completed.

Winter Quarter, with our study of Isaiah, was about developing a Christian vision of the future of creation, inspired by the poet’s images of a new earth. This magnificent book is filled with dramatic visions of the world that is coming – the kingdom of God. Weapons turned into farming tools; lions and sheep playing together in the fields. It’s a new world on the horizon, and in that new world God and all of creation are united and reconciled “and every tear is wiped away” (Is. 25:8).

This quarter, in our study of Acts, we want to learn what it means to be the community of people that follows our master Jesus toward that future – the kingdom of God. Jesus is gone, but he promised to return – what do we do while we’re waiting? Jesus said that he had to leave so that the Spirit could come to us – what does it look like to live in God’s Spirit now? These are the questions we want to be about this spring.

We begin our study this quarter by reading the first three chapters of Acts. In the very beginning we read this about what Jesus said and did after rising from the dead:

“After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.” (Acts 1:3)

When Jesus rose from the dead, his message was the same as it always had been: the kingdom of God that is coming, and the way it is breaking into the world even now. But after his death and resurrection, Jesus’ teaching was geared toward preparing his followers for their mission in the world. He was about to leave, and he wanted them to carry on his message and his work. We read in chapter 1 that some of the followers asked Jesus about the kingdom of God, wondering when exactly it was going to arrive on earth in its entirety. But Jesus would not tell them. “It is not for you to know,” he said to them, “but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses” (Acts 1:7-8).

The teaching of Jesus is clear. Yes, we believe with all our hearts that the kingdom of God is coming – the promises of God will be fulfilled, and all of creation will be healed. But “it is not for you to know” when all this will happen. For now, our mission is this: to be filled by God’s Spirit and to be witnesses of this Good News in all the earth. We are the signs of a world to come. We are the community that brings a joyful message to the whole earth. We believe that God will restore all things, and so we devote our whole lives to doing his work of reconciliation wherever we are – ”until the time of universal restoration that God announced long ago” (Acts 3:21).

**Study Questions** (for individuals or groups):
- Committing ourselves to the kingdom of God is not only about believing – it is also about living differently. For the early followers of Jesus, one of the first things that changed in their lives was the way they lived together as brothers and sisters in community. Read the second part of Acts 2 – how did the early church live, and how do you think this is connected to the kingdom of God that is coming?