

Sermon Easter 6 PDS 2015

Today's readings are uplifting and challenging and Psalm 98 which is set for today is full of praise "Sing to the Lord a new song for he has done marvellous things". We are coming to the end of the Easter season, Jesus will ascend into heaven, his resurrection appearances will cease, but his Spirit will remain active with believers.

The reading from the book of Acts is preceded by the vision of Cornelius, a "God-fearing man, he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly". He had had a vision and had sent for Peter as he was told to. Peter had also had a vision and had been told by God not to "call anything impure that God has made clean", and had been told by the Spirit to go with Cornelius' men.

When Peter arrives at Cornelius' house he finds it full of people, Peter explains that although it is against Jewish law to visit Gentiles, he had been made aware that this was not what God wanted. Peter talks to them about God, Jesus and their witness that he had risen from the

dead, in fact he had eaten and drunk with them, and that everyone would receive forgiveness of sins if they believed in him.

These people received the gift of the Holy Spirit and were praising God in tongues. These devout people suddenly found another way to praise God and another reason as well, they had received the good news of Jesus' life and resurrection.

The Jews of course had had many centuries of living with the law not to integrate with gentiles so it must have been difficult for them to realise just what Jesus meant when he said "Love one another as I have loved you". This is probably something we all struggle with from time to time.

But what a reassurance we receive later in that reading from John's gospel, that we are his friends, that we were chosen by him, that we are loved. I was one of those who were often left until the end when choosing was going on for teams at school – I was useless at sports. But it is not easy feeling unwanted and there are

many other situations in life that give us that feeling. The word translated as 'friend' is from the verb to love, and our word friend doesn't really convey that love undergirding this use of the word friend. We are to abide in that love. What a wonderful place to live surrounded by love, living in love, two of the definitions of abide given in the dictionary are: to live in, and to remain stable or fixed.

We are loved by God, what a powerful statement that is, the God who knows all our flaws, all our weaknesses loves us and has chosen us. We are asked to obey because we also love, not because we are frightened or are toadying up, but because we love the God who loves us. This is an intimate relationship, but not sappy or romantic, it is relationship that we have seen mirrored in Jesus' life with God.

This relationship also makes demands on us, that out of the great love we have received we should love others, that the love that we have should overflow to others. We are asked to bear fruit, fruit that will last, the fruits of the Spirit

that Jesus left for us. We are told in Galatians 5:22 that "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control". The Spirit produces these characteristics found in the nature of Christ. If we want the fruit of the Spirit to grow in us, we must join our lives to Christ's, we must know him, love him, remember him and imitate him. We must ask him, by the power of the Spirit, to come into our lives so that we can fulfil the great commandments to love God and to love one another.

How would our lives look, how would our church life look if we could all love one another as Jesus loves us, if we could all really know that we are loved by him, chosen by him, if our lives were fruitful and we then, by the lives we were living, could make disciples of all the world?

Accepting that we are loved by him, chosen by him and that we can have the power of the Holy Spirit if we chose to use it, is a big step for us to

take. Let's step out together, as a community of believers, and abide in God's love.