

A message that does not discriminate. Reflection based on Acts 10.34-48 & Isaiah 56. 1-8

Acts 10.1-33 tells the story of how God prepares the way for the meeting of Cornelius and Peter. Cornelius was keen to hear Peter's message and Peter was beginning to realise that the message about Jesus was not just for the Jews but for everyone. God had made Peter fully aware that we are all equal members of God's family.

Acts 10:34-48 tells us that Peter had an eager audience and was quick to seize on the situation. In the Old Testament God had chosen Israel as his people to be example to others. It is clear, however, with the arrival of Jesus that God's message was for all who wish to follow his ways and not on any merits of the people, so there is no inconsistency in the claim that God accepts people of all nations on the same basis as He accepted Israel.

The way Peter begins his remarks indicates Cornelius was already familiar with the story and did not really need to hear it again. Peter is simply confirming their existing knowledge and belief. The message begins by asserting that in Jesus, God has fulfilled his promise in the Old Testament to bring peace to his people.

The Gift of the spirit conveys power and with this power Jesus was able to bring help and healing to people from the power of evil which was responsible for their suffering. Peter regularly refers in his sermons to the Apostles as witness to the resurrection. They had been the people who had been with Jesus right from the beginning of his ministry. After the resurrection Jesus commanded the Apostles to preach to the people. Peter declares that in accordance with prophecy everyone who believes in Jesus can have forgiveness of their sins.

We are all equal in God eyes is not a new message because it can be found in Isaiah 56: 1-8. The passage brings together the familiar themes of justice and righteousness. The passage makes clear that God's house is for all members of humanity not just Jew. Just as Jesus interpreted the commandment Love your neighbour.

I am concerned that protest groups like the Black Live Matter and other human rights groups can sometimes be hijacked by people who have a different agenda. Throwing stones and missiles or rioting and burning building distracts from the real issues. Violence only brings suffering to the innocent which we can clearly see from what is happening in Africa. Violence is not the Christian way we have to reach out in a loving way to help people understand that all discrimination is wrong and contrary to Jesus message of love. Sadly, discrimination is not just based on the colour of a person's skin. There is discrimination towards people with disabilities, country of origin, age, and migrants to name a few. We have to reflect God's love for all in our action, stand up to discrimination and help those who are disadvantaged by the attitudes within society.

There could be no mistake about what had happened in the story in Act. Just as the first Jewish believer had received the spirit and praised God in other tongues on the day of Pentecost. God welcomes all, we should also do the same. Baptism had become the outward

sign of reception into the people of God. It was the sign of cleansing from sin and so forgiveness. When we receive the Spirit, it cleanses us with an inward baptism.

The Isaiah makes the point that Justice and Righteousness are universal virtues. Membership of God's family does not depend on physical appearance or ritual ceremonies but on obedience. It is open to all who wish to adopt the way of life and to love the name of the Lord and to be his servants They are told that they will be welcomed into the full membership of God's people. I see this an unusually clear message to the Christian church to cut through barriers of tradition and conventions and open its doors to all. Reaching out in love and encouraging all people to join us.

Amen