

Wednesday 13th May

Acts 10:34-43 Gentiles Hear the Good News

Then Peter began to speak to them: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.'

Peter had a change of heart and mind through his encounter with God in a vision of food on a sheet (earlier in Chapter 10). There are times when we can be deeply challenged though an experience that has made us question a long held belief or perspective on a situation, what I have referred to on many occasion as a Fagin moment – “I think I better think it out again.”

Over the years in our journey with God, if we have been listening, our understanding of how we should behave in different situation can change as our understanding of the nature of God is amended. God does not change, yet since humankind's first experience and concept of God our perception of God has developed and deepened as God has revealed more of his nature to us.

I am grateful to a supernumerary minister, who for a number of years was in worship I led, he never told me I was wrong but on occasions would suggest I looked at an issue from a different angle. A helpful suggestion was always welcome.

“Anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.” At first sight a simple statement until one has to decide what is right. One persons right may not be the same as another's.

It is a Tuesday morning and I should not be in the study as I am meant to be on leave – should I be here, is that right, after all I am choosing to be here? Silly example.

There is much confusion in our society at the moment around what we can and cannot do in this “new phase” of social distancing. In Scotland, Wales and Ireland it is simple- Stay Home! In England today I can go for exercise once, tomorrow I can exercise as many times as I choose; today I can travel to the supermarket, the pharmacy or my place of work tomorrow I can go to the seaside as long as I keep 2 metres from the next person. Yet behind all this freedom is a command to keep others and yourself safe.

Freedom brings choice and choice can bring questions. Peter was happy with the OT rules re food and what was clean and unclean; he was happy with keeping the message of the Messiah to the Jewish community. A vision caused him to rethink and take the message of Jesus into a Gentile household and ultimately to a wider Gentile Community.

Within the life of the Church people are at different points in their journey of faith and may well see things differently. This can cause tension and even a split in a faith community, a friendship or a family. That is not how it is meant to be; in love we should discuss, debate, reason and seek reconciliation and if needed live with our differences. In the Principles for Group Bible Study that I came across many years ago is a statement “We must assume that we will arrive at different understandings of portions of Scripture and that this will not disturb God as it will some of us.”

As we shall be looking in the coming weeks at how we shall return to collective worship some will have differing view to others; we shall need to respect our differences, seek to keep all safe and above all love one another.

The important thing is that we worship God and spread the news that Jesus is the Messiah who has a message of peace for all.