**Reflections 18-24 May Easter 5 - Making all things new**

**Bible study on Acts 11:1-18**

**Begin with an opening prayer**

God, who makes all things new,
we gather together today to bring you praise.
We offer ourselves afresh in your service.
We’re sorry for all the ways we have fallen short
of your ideal over the last week.
Make us new again.
**Amen.**

**Read the passage**

*Consider different ways to read the text. For example, hearing it in more than one version of the Bible.*

Acts 11: 1-18

**11**The apostles and the believers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. **2**So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him **3**and said, “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.”

**4**Starting from the beginning, Peter told them the whole story: **5**“I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. **6**I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles and birds. **7**Then I heard a voice telling me, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’

**8**“I replied, ‘Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’

**9**“The voice spoke from heaven a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’ **10**This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again.

**11**“Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying.

**Explore and respond to the text**

*Start by reading the Bible notes below. You may want to read them more than once or pause after each paragraph to reflect on what you have read.*

**Bible notes**

This passage is Peter’s explanation of his meeting in Caesarea with Cornelius, a Roman centurion attracted to Jewish monotheism (Acts 10:1-2). Peter had baptized Cornelius, together with ‘his relatives and close friends’ (10:24), with water. These Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit as Peter was sharing with them ‘the message God sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ’ (10:36). Now speaking to his fellow Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, Peter does not impose his authority but shares what has happened ‘step by step’, moving from his vision of unclean creatures in Joppa to his understanding of its significance in Caesarea. In Acts, it is always ‘the word of God’ that moves the story forward ‘step by step’. We hear that it ‘continued to spread’ (6:7) and ‘gain adherents’ (12:24), spreading ‘throughout the region’ (13:49) so that it ‘grew mightily and prevailed’ (19:20). This critical breakthrough from Jewish separateness is summarised as ‘the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God’, and we hear that ‘the Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us’. Indeed, Cornelius himself had received a vision of an angel speaking about ‘the message by which you and your entire household will be saved’. The Jewish Pentecost was interpreted as the fulfilment of God’s word through the prophet Joel (Acts 2:14-21). And, as Peter remembers Jesus’ words, he interprets this Gentile Pentecost as the fulfilment of the word of the Lord, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit’ (see Luke 3:16 and Acts 1:5). Peter’s fellow Jewish Christians in Jerusalem initially criticised him for accepting Cornelius’ invitation to eat with Gentiles. The climax of his explanation is his question, ‘Who was I that I could hinder God?’ Reconsidering their criticism they praise God anew: ‘God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life’. Gentile and Jewish Christians are learning together not to hinder the God who moves ‘step by step’, making all things new.

**Reflection**

*Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.*

Consider how food can be part of our identity – staple foods vary across cultures and some faiths have rules about what you can and can’t eat. However, food can also exclude if people don’t know the rules about what can be eaten and how (just think of going to a posh dinner and being presented with an array of unfamiliar cutlery). Jesus has given us a new identity, but this takes time to work out, step by step. Consider the significance of the numbers contained in the Acts passage (three times, six witnesses, which was double the usual number needed normally to verify something as true). How can we distinguish as a community between rules that protect us and rules that we need to be liberated from?

**Questions for reflection**

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| A bowl of ice cream and french fries  AI-generated content may be incorrect. |  |

**Questions**

* What’s your reaction to this image – disgust? Delight?
* What unusual food combinations do you enjoy/detest?
* What might God be asking you to ‘make new’ this season?

 **A prayer to end the Bible study**

Life-giving God, Alpha and Omega, beginning and end,
journey with us as we go from this place into our communities.
As we look forward to the time when you will make all things new,
enable us, by your Spirit, to bring your kingdom here on earth.
**Amen.**