

May 9<sup>th</sup> Jacki Thomas  
Acts 10 : 44 – end  
John 15: 9 – 17

The first of our two readings this morning is from Acts 10 – Mike is going to read it for us but first let's remind ourselves of the earlier part of the story

Do you remember the centurion Cornelius, who lived in Caesarea, He was a devout man who was visited by an angel who told him that his prayers and acts of mercy were known to God and he was to send to Joppa for a man named Simon Peter.

Meanwhile in Joppa Peter had a vision of a sheet coming down from heaven. On the sheet were all kinds of animals which a voice told Peter to kill and eat. Peter was shocked for the Jewish people considered some of the animals unclean. Peter protested that he had never eaten anything unclean. The voice told him not to call unclean what God had cleansed.

Then messengers from Cornelius arrived – as they were not Jews but gentiles they waited at the door. They asked Peter to come to Cornelius's house. Peter amazed everyone by inviting them in and then the next day went with them to Cornelius's house. Much to the amazement of all that were there Peter went into the house – the house of a gentile.

Peter began speaking by explaining that he had come to understand that God has no favourites. He then told the story of the Good News of Jesus Christ. Mike is now going to read us what happened next:

<sup>44</sup> While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. <sup>45</sup> The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. <sup>46</sup> For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.

Then Peter said, <sup>47</sup> "Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have."<sup>48</sup> So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

This is the word of the Lord **Thanks be to God**

Did you notice that the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The believers with Peter were astonished that the Spirit came even on the gentiles. And even on those who were not baptized.

God does not discriminate – we are all his children. The Holy Spirit is for all of us. Some were then baptized into the Church which receives the person on behalf of Jesus and takes responsibility for the person's growing in faith. No wonder they asked Peter to stay with them – their understanding of God and God's love had been challenged, broadened and they wanted to understand, learn more. What more would Peter teach them?

I feel pretty certain that he would have spoken about God's love for each and everyone of us shown in and by Jesus. Perhaps he told them how Jesus explained that He was and is the vine and the disciples and we are the branches. We heard that story last week and Mary explained to us that if we are joined to Jesus as the branches are joined to the vine then we like the branches are nourished. We need to be in Him and allow Him to be in us. Today's Gospel continues this idea of being in Jesus, remaining in his love.

<sup>9</sup>“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.<sup>10</sup> If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. <sup>11</sup>I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. <sup>12</sup> My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. <sup>14</sup> You are my friends if you do what I command. <sup>15</sup> I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. <sup>16</sup> You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. <sup>17</sup> This is my command: Love each other.

The love of God, the love of Jesus, is beyond our comprehension. It is not romantic love, it is not sympathy or empathy or concern or care. Rather it is all of these things and more. If we try to understand this love with our minds we only see a bit of the picture. This love has a depth which is all-consuming, all-pervading, overwhelming, overpowering, healing, releasing...

Jesus loved the disciples as they were – he sees us as we are and loves us as we are, even when we need pruning! His love is unconditional, no strings attached.

Jesus chose us to share that love and share his work in showing that love to the whole world. To share his work not as servants but as his friends. We are to be ambassadors, representing Jesus in the world. Put it another way: We are to be good adverts for Jesus.

That means not trying to control or manipulate each other, not competing with each other, not disputing, not quarrelling, not arguing, not criticizing, not complaining about other people’s behaviour. No doubt you can add to this list...

It also means recognizing wrong doing, wrong thinking, wrong speaking. None of these wrongs is a good advert for Jesus. Rather such wrongs get in the way, they prevent us showing God’s love. But it is not always easy to recognize these wrongs. We may have to be prepared to delve deeply into our subconscious to recognize why we act, think or speak as we do. For example: for a long time I was very wary of Asian men. I struggled to be tolerant so love as Jesus loved was out of the question. What’s more I didn’t really want to know what the root cause was. Then one day when talking about my University years I remembered an experience in a shop – I believed the Asian shopkeeper had short-changed me. There was the root of my difficulty – which God and I are (still) working on. On a lighter note a friend of mine said that she always had trouble loving as Jesus loves when the person had red hair – she had red hair herself! So we explored whether she believed Jesus loved her and how she felt about receiving his love.

Recognition is the beginning of the process of pruning – we bring the wrong to God who forgives, cuts it away and heals the cut – thus releasing us to receive and to show God’s love.

It is not enough to tolerate other people, it is not enough to avoid conscious - or unconscious - bias or discrimination. God’s unconditional love knows no restrictions. God’s love bestows value on people, respects them, loves them as they are. God loves us as we are, even if we need a lot of pruning! God loves us as we are and wants us to love others in the same way. Love them as they are – not as we think they should be! Our role is to love others as God in Jesus loves us.

Amen.