

Helping or hindering?

Notes on the Bible readings

- The Acts passage immediately follows Peter's visit to Cornelius' house in Caesarea, when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the devout centurion and his family and friends, in a Gentile Pentecost. Peter is challenged by the apostles to explain his radical actions in associating with uncircumcised Gentiles, with whom table fellowship was forbidden. He describes a repeated vision of a sheet descending from heaven filled with all sorts of birds and animals, and a voice telling him that God makes no distinction between 'clean' and 'unclean'. Peter understood this to mean that there are no longer any barriers dividing Gentile and Jewish believers, and that they have all been blessed with 'the same gift' (v.17).

- This is a pivotal moment in the history of the Early Church, when God's love overflows and breaks down the boundaries of the community, making the gift of the Holy Spirit available to all. The Spirit of Jesus will not be hindered by human divisions and is spreading from Jerusalem, through Samaria and Roman Caesarea to the rest of the world.

- In Acts, the Holy Spirit shows that Jesus' commandment to 'love one another' (John 13.34) is not merely about close fellowship but about overcoming our human divisions.

Questions for reflection

- ▶ Where do you see walls going up in your community?
- ▶ How might you build bridges instead?
- ▶ Where is the Holy Spirit to be found at work?



A prayer of thanksgiving

God of joy, we give thanks for the witness of Peter and Cornelius that affirms the inclusivity of your love and your grace. Help us to recognise more clearly your Spirit at work in those different from ourselves, and to celebrate the gift of diversity that defines your kingdom and colours your world. Amen.

A prayer for others

We pray, dear God, for places where there is division and for countries in the grip of civil war...may your Holy Spirit bring peace; for countries where there is religious persecution... may your Holy Spirit bring unity; for towns and cities where gang warfare brings fear... may your Holy Spirit bring hope; for communities where there is inequality... may your Holy Spirit bring dignity; for workplaces where there is insecurity... may your Holy Spirit bring confidence; for homes where there is brokenness... may your Holy Spirit bring healing. Amen.

A personal prayer

God of all ages and all stability, change can be exciting and threatening, difference can be fun and frightening. Help me to discern the difference, and to be a helper not a hinderer to the work and growth and mission of your kingdom. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

For reflection and comment linking this week's Bible reading to the news, current issues and events, go to www.rootsontheweb.com and click on PostScript.



Live your faith

Think twice before simply deciding that the views, actions or words of someone you disagree with are 'wrong'!