

Sunday Thought

9th May 2021 Sixth Sunday of Easter

Readings

Acts 10: 44 - 48

Psalm 98

1 John 5: 1 – 6

John 15: 9 - 17

Gospel Pandemic!

Perhaps the Covid19 pandemic has helped us realise the potential of things happening in our own backyard. A simple transaction made in a downtown



market thousands of miles away may have exponentially disrupted the life of the whole world! That like other diseases, war, careless use of the environment, is a fearful prospect. Conversely it has been the aim of Christians for over twenty centuries – to bring about a *Gospel Pandemic!*

That is the theme of today's readings. From the Acts we have the story of Peter's discovery that the Good News from God is for ALL people regardless of race or social status. The psalmist rejoices in God's rule of justice and fairness for the whole world. John, writing from Ephesus, assures us of his belief that faith in Jesus as God's Son is the sure means by which love will conquer all the world's ills and give peace and justice for all people. That is backed by the gospel passage recalling the words of Jesus himself. He has called us God's friends – just like Abraham in the past – friends whom Jesus has chosen to share God's love with him and with all people, everywhere.

What happened to Peter was critical in the life of the new Church. It will be helpful to read the whole story (all of chapter ten). Peter was called to give the good news of Jesus to Cornelius who was a 'non-Jew'. Cornelius was also a respected Army Captain living in Caesarea. As a result of Peter's preaching, Cornelius and others became Christians and received gifts of the Holy Spirit. Peter had to accept that the Gospel is not just for the Jews but for all people everywhere, as Jesus had told them. Now, at that precise time in history the world was ready for a *pan-gospel*. We sometimes have a small picture of Jesus' world. It was in fact expanding rapidly. Jesus' home at Nazareth was close to a Roman military highway and a vital East/West trade route. He could even have been using items made from Cornish tin and clay!!

Wherever it began, the present pandemic has certainly impacted the whole world. Hundreds of thousands of people are still suffering and dying; life in every part has been affected, from education to medical waiting lists; haircuts to holidays; nations have shared vaccines and other medical needs; local neighbourhood schemes have been ensuring well-being

I am personally grateful for having been given a world vision from earliest days. My faith formation was interspersed with missionary stories and books about gospel pioneers. It was a time when missionaries on furlough conducted special time of worship, challenging us to support their work financially and prayerfully. To become a member of the Methodist Church was at the same time to be enrolled in its missionary society - every member a missionary! We had a world-consciousness which crept into every prayer-time. It was recognised that churches with a world vision were most likely to be active and growing churches at home. We are still privileged to be part of the World Council of Churches!

Peter's change of thinking about the *pan gospel* was preceded by a personal vision while at prayer in Joppa. He saw a sail-cloth full of many kinds of animals and was challenged by a voice telling him to *kill and eat*. As a Jew who saw most other meats as unclean, he instantly replied '*No Lord! I can't do that! I've never done that!*' Of course, the vision alluded to differences in his mind between Jews and other races. He was soon to learn the vision's meaning when he met with Cornelius.

Peter's real difficulty is explained in his simple two word response - '*No Lord!*' If Jesus really is Lord of our lives those two words can never be spoken together when he challenges us to new things!

A prayer

[Based on Psalm 98]

*Lord, our God, we praise you:
You have done wonderful things:
You rule over the whole world:
You desire justice and fairness for all people:
You love all life in the world:
In Jesus, you gave yourself for the whole world.*

*May we, in obedient love for you,
help to bring about the day when all people
everywhere share our song of good news praise.*



Pray for the world