

Friends

The lectionary for this Sunday morning includes Acts 10:44-48. In the time from Easter to Pentecost, we hear some of the occurrences in the Acts of the Apostles, reminding us what the Holy Spirit did for them and what we are therefore offered. This little short reading is located in a much wider sweep of story that involves Peter being offered a variety of food in a vision and telling God that he cannot eat it because it is unclean, with God telling him that if he tells him it is now clean, then of course he can eat it. Challenged by this thinking, Peter is then faced with the household of the Gentile Cornelius who has felt called by God to ask Peter to come and explain the Gospel to them. Ultimately, this leads to their baptism as they are filled with the Spirit. “While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the gentiles, for they heard the speaking in tongues and extolling God. Peter said: “Can anybody withhold the water for baptising these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?”

It is always a shock when people who we have declared or felt to be “other” than us turn out to have our gifts. How can that be? How can “they” who grew up in a different country, on a different continent, who wear different clothes or eat different food or have had a different education or have a different accent or sense of humour, how can they have our gifts?

For the Jewish people at the time of Jesus, the knowledge that they were God’s chosen people was incredibly significant to their understanding of who they were – their national identity was tied up in it. The idea that started to be developed as the disciples spread out from Jerusalem and told the story to the Samaritans and to the Gentiles, encouraging them to establish churches was potentially frightening to those who had so much invested in the idea that there was one true God, and they had him.

I wonder if we are not sometimes guilty of similar thought patterns, albeit reinterpreted for our own times?

The day we truly wake up to the idea that God does not have favourites is the day everything changes.

God bless, Vicci