



**Sunday Worship for 12th July
Fifth Sunday after Trinity**



Introduction

Though we cannot come together physically, we gather spiritually as the family of God in our Father's presence to offer him praise and thanksgiving, to hear and receive his holy word, to bring before him the needs of the world, to ask forgiveness for our sins and to seek his grace, that, through his son Jesus Christ we may give ourselves for his service.

Service leader's introduction from Brian Settle

Welcome everyone to our time together this morning.
Recently I celebrated my birthday, I was pleased with all the attention (cards, cake, no flowers!) but I didn't feel any different in my soul. When I/we focus on God for a prayer & worship time or anything else concerning the Lord, there is a noticeable difference in our inner man. It is the Holy Spirit moving in us when we forget about our 'flesh' (the daily routines, worries/ jobs to do etc) be encouraged this morning (or whenever you follow this service) to forget about yourself and let the Holy Spirit work in you! It's for everyone that has declared Jesus to be their Lord & Saviour & invited the Holy Spirit to live in them.

GREETING AND OPENING PRAYERS;

We have come together in the name of Christ,
to offer our praise and thanksgiving,
to hear and receive God`s Holy word,
to pray for the needs of the world,
and to seek the forgiveness of our sins,
that by the power of the Holy Spirit
we may give ourselves to the service of God.

AMEN

Song: We have come into His house

**We have come into His house and gathered In His name to worship Him
We have come into His house and gathered In His name to worship Him
We have come into His house and gathered In His name to worship Him
Worship Him, Christ, the Lord**

**So forget about yourself and concentrate on Him and worship Him
So forget about yourself and concentrate on Him and worship Him
So forget about yourself and concentrate on Him and worship Him
Worship Him, Christ, the Lord**

**Let us lift up holy hands and magnify His name and worship Him
Let us lift up holy hands and magnify His Name and worship Him
Let us lift up holy hands and magnify His name and worship Him
Worship Him, Christ, the Lord**

Confession

As members of God`s family, let us come back to him to seek his forgiveness.

**FATHER, WE HAVE SINNED AGAINST HEAVEN AND AGAINST YOU.
WE ARE NOT WORTHY TO BE CALLED YOUR CHILDREN.
WE TURN TO YOU AGAIN.
HAVE MERCY ON US AND BRING US BACK TO YOURSELF
AS THOSE WHO ONCE WERE DEAD BUT NOW HAVE LIFE,
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD. AMEN.**

May the God of all healing and forgiveness draw us to himself,
and cleanse us from all our sins
that we may behold the glory of his Son, the Word made flesh,
Jesus Christ our Lord

Amen

Readings

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. **12** The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man's house. **13** He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, 'Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. **14** He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.'

15 "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. **16** Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with ^[b] the Holy Spirit.' **17** So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God's way?"

18 When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life."

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Mark 10: 13-16

13 People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. **14** When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. **15** Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." **16** And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Song: 613 Spirit of the living God

**Spirit of the living God
Fall afresh on me;
Spirit of the living God
Fall afresh on me:
Fill me anew, fill me anew;
Spirit of the living God
Fall afresh on me.**

**Spirit of the living God
Fall afresh on me;
Spirit of the living God
Fall afresh on me:
Fill me anew, fill me anew;
Spirit of the living God
Fall afresh on me.**

Sermon (by Paul Clayton)

The Holy Spirit: It's For Everyone

Acts 11: 1 - 18 / Mark 10: 13 - 16

The theme of our talk this morning is, "The Holy Spirit - It's For Everyone".

Peter made this statement on the day of Pentecost:

"Repent and be baptised, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" Acts 2: 38.

The emphasis here is on the words, "every one of you", Peter makes no distinction between race or creed. We further read 3,000 were added to the number of believers that day. Many of these people were in Jerusalem for the Feast of Weeks festival and would have gone back to their own countries later. We read the Church continued to grow at this time, but was it one big happy family? No, it had its problems. The New Church consisted mainly of Jewish believers, but there would also be proselytes who had converted to Judaism. However, within this group of people, there were Hebraic (Hebrew) Jews and Hellenistic (Greek) Jews. The Hebraic Jews were very much into tradition and upholding the Law, whereas the Hellenistic Jews had been brought up in a completely different culture. Language was also a problem, Hebraic Jews spoke Aramaic, whereas the Hellenistic Jews possibly spoke only Greek. The predominant group were the Hebraic Jews, so many of the services may have been in Aramaic or Hebrew. Within the Hebraic Jews there was a particularly strict group, who still felt salvation and the Holy Spirit for everyone did not mean everyone. Such confusion!

A further problem which arose, described by Luke in Acts Chapter 6, was that the Hellenistic Jews felt the widows in their group were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. The apostles solved this by having seven men chosen to sort this problem out. They were ordinary men, but men full of the Spirit and wisdom. Many scholars believe these seven men were the early Deacons of the Church. Problem solved. In the early Church which, has been called the Perfect Church, differences were to surface again later. Some two thousand years on, we have our differences and they are not always as easy to sort out, as in Acts Chapter 6. If we had to pick a phrase out in this passage that helped the situation be sorted it would be the description of one of those seven chosen, Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit (v5).

We know Stephen to be the first Christian martyr, who, as he died, said, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (Acts 7: 60).

Full of Faith and the Holy Spirit, are the two main requisites to be a model Christian.

Members of the early Church had those two factors in abundance and were able to see God work miracles among ordinary people, a lesson for us all.

Now to our reading from Acts 11, I would encourage people to read the previous chapter (10) to help understand the context of our reading from Acts 11.

Peter begins by addressing the leaders of the Judean churches in Jerusalem about a visit he had made to a Centurion's house in Caesarea, a town on the coast about 50 miles from Jerusalem. The dialogue begins with this strict group of Jewish believers, here called the circumcised believers, or in the King James Bible, men of the circumcision, who criticized Peter and said, "You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them."

The statement the men made is rather interesting, because there is no reference in the Scriptures or Jewish Law of it being wrong to enter the house of a Gentile. Eating with them would be a problem because of Jewish purity laws, but entering a house was not a problem and Luke does not mention a meal. Some scholars suggest Luke, who was a Gentile (Greek), did not fully understand Jewish Law.

In verse 4 we hear, "Peter began and explained everything to them precisely as it had happened." It's now about 15 years since an arrogant Peter said he would die for Jesus, then shortly after he denied he ever knew him. Here we see a confident Peter giving an account of what happened.

Luke in his attention for detail uses the word "precisely" to stress the accuracy of the account. It's marvellous what God can do with people, if those people are willing to submit to him. God changes lives, Peter, no more the humble fisherman, but a person who has earned a reputation so even Centurions call to him for help. Are we willing to let God shape our lives in his service?

The narrative in our reading is almost a repeat of the previous chapter, mentioning this situation twice shows how important Luke felt it was.

Peter recalls the situation, he begins with his time in Joppa, a city about 25 miles from Caesarea. Peter is praying on the roof of a house and has a vision of a sheet being let down from heaven and on it were all sorts of animals and wild beasts and birds. Peter heard a voice say,

"Get up Peter, kill and eat." v7

Peter replied, "Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has even entered my mouth." v8

A voice from heaven replied, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." v9

This particular passage has been used many times in sermons talking about equality. In the previous chapter, Peter when he realises what the vision meant said,

"I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism but accepts people from every nation who fear him and do what is right."

Acts 10: 34/35

To the Jews, this would be hard to believe, their whole history told them, they were God's chosen ones. The Scriptures said this, but what they could not see was that the Scriptures pointed to a new covenant that God would make with all mankind.

To further support his message Peter quotes the prophecy spoken by the prophet Joel:

"I will pour my Spirit on all people." (Joel 2: 28)

A clear promise from God that the Holy Spirit would be bestowed on all.

Jesus confirmed the New Covenant at the Last Supper and rubber stamped it at Calvary. Jesus also encouraged his disciples, on the Mount of Ascension, to spread the Good News in all Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth. Salvation and the Holy Spirit were for everyone who believed.

Back to Peter giving his account of the situation to the leaders in Jerusalem. He tells them that after the sheet had gone back up into heaven, three men from the Centurion's house in Caesarea came to see him. They asked Peter if he would go with them to the house of Cornelius the Centurion and talk to him. Peter meets with Cornelius in his house and Cornelius said an angel had spoken to him and asked him to bring Peter to talk to him.

Peter then says to the leaders in Jerusalem:

"As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them, as he had come on us in the beginning" v15

Peter at this point remembered the words of Jesus who said, "John Baptised you with water, but you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit." v16

Then Peter challenges the leaders by asking, "So if God gave them the same gift he gave us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think I could oppose God." v17

Then we read, when Peter said these words the leaders were satisfied and said, "So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life" v18

So, what can we learn from this passage to apply to our own Christian lives?

Let's look at the three key areas of the passage one at a time and see what God is saying to us.

1. The Jerusalem Leaders Reaction

2. Peter's Defence

3. The Consequences

The Jerusalem Leaders Reaction

Although the Apostles were the key leaders here, they were also a dominant group known as circumcised believers. This group were very strict and ultra conservative. It's interesting here the word criticise (v2) is interpreted as discernment, whereas in the King James version, the word is contended, which literally means to judge. The Greek word is diakrino meaning to judge.

As Christians, the Holy Spirit gives us the gift of discernment, (1 Corinthians 2: 14) but sometimes instead of discerning we are judging. The Scriptures clearly tell us it is not our place to judge (James 4: 12)

"There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you - who are you to judge your neighbour?"

It is so easy in this present society to use Christian values to judge people, what they wear, what they say, how they act. It's hard sometimes to remember God's wonderful grace is the reason for where we are and who we are.

Peter's Defence

One of the things I learned from Peter's defence, as I mentioned earlier was

how God had changed him. A once Galilee fisherman who could be called arrogant and impetuous, to someone who could address the Jerusalem

Leaders so precisely. He also appeared to have the role visiting and overseeing the new church development in Judea.

God can change lives, if people are prepared to let him, a belief and a strong faith will ensure the Holy Spirit will always be present to help.

I remember listening to a preacher who's life had been changed dramatically by God. He was a compulsive gambler, heavily in debt and he ended up going to counselling. The counsellor was a Christian and after a number of meetings our gambler became a Christian. He said I used to have a bowl full of useless betting slips, now I have a table to put the bowl on, and a house that belongs to me and my family.

I think the key factor in Peter's defence is in the belief, God has no favourites, his salvation and Holy Spirit is there for everyone who believes.

It's rather ironic, Peter's vision about equality and God not showing favouritism seems a long way off in our present society. We hear about inequality between different races, the gender gap, society as a whole has a wide gap between rich and poor. Sadly, sometimes the global Church plays a part in this inequality.

A saying attributed to John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople in the 4th century:

"God made for us two kinds of eyes: those of flesh and those of faith."

Our physical eyes can see all things going on around us, our faith eyes only see Jesus. Focussing on Jesus, we see the world through his eyes and become more like him. Paul's answer to inequality is in Galatians 3: 26 - 28.

"You are all people of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptised into Christ, have clothed themselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

The Consequences

We read the leaders of the Judean churches meeting in Jerusalem accepted Peter's account of his visit to Cornelius and we read they praised God. All seems well, however, the strict group of Jewish Christians (circumcised believers) many of whom were Pharisees, appear again in Acts 15 at the Council of Jerusalem. The group became known as Judaizers, who are Christians who teach it is necessary to adopt Jewish customs and

practices, especially those found in the Law of Moses, to be saved. The Judaizers at the Council of Jerusalem said:

"The Gentiles (believers) must be circumcised and required to obey the Law of Moses." Acts 15: 5b
Having read Acts 15 and seen the judgement made by the leaders, we see some progress made, although, tensions still existed. Much of Paul's letter to the Galatian Church is about condemning legalism, Paul tells them that Law and Grace cannot operate together. I would like to say this sorted it out, but it didn't. This problem would rumble on for a long time to come. As Christianity spread further away, the Judaizing influence became less of a problem.

However, what about us today? In today's church legalism can still be a problem, but let us be guided by what Paul reminds us:

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the Gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast" Ephesians 2: 8/9

So, the Holy Spirit is for everyone, there is nothing complicated, all we need to do is take on board the words of Peter on the day of Pentecost:

"Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Christ Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the Gift of the Holy Spirit"

The same conditions apply 2,000 years later, nothing has changed, although some Christian groups may tell you otherwise. The Holy Spirit is here, we do not have to call him to come, he has been here since Pentecost AD30 and he has never gone away. So, we can all be like Stephen, the first Christian martyr, full of faith, and with that the Holy Spirit can work in our lives. I will leave you with a prayer of Bede of Jarrow:

"Lord open my heart and illuminate it with the grace of your Holy Spirit.

By this grace, may I always seek to do what is pleasing to you,

direct my thoughts and feelings so that I may come at last to the unending joys of heaven.

That on earth I may keep your commandments and so be worthy of your everlasting reward"

Amen

Affirmation of Faith

Let us declare our faith in God.

**" I recognize that there is only one true and living God
who exists as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit"**

**"I recognize Jesus Christ as the Messiah,
the word who became flesh and dwelt among us"**

**"I believe that God has proven his love for me because
when I was still a sinner, Christ died for me"**

**" I believe that I am now a child of God,
I was saved by the grace of God through faith"**

**"I choose to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might,
I put no confidence in the flesh"**

**"I ask my heavenly father to fill me with his Holy Spirit,
lead me into all truth and empower my life"**

"I crucify the flesh and choose to walk by the Holy Spirit"

Prayers (written by Terry Reed)

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.

Psalm 46:1

Father God, we come to you in prayer bringing our doubts and worries and know that you are listening and ready to help us. We bring our hopes and joys and know that you are there to share them with us. Through these difficult times we are encouraged by our faith and thank you for

being our refuge and strength.

We pray for our friends and neighbours and think particularly of our beloved church family. We pray particularly for those who are still shielding and those in isolation. May your love sustain them until we come together again to celebrate our faith and friendship. Loving Father, be their refuge and their strength.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Life behind closed doors can be very challenging for many but even more so during this crisis. Father God, we bring prayers for all who are lonely and those who are suffering and hurting. We pray for those who are vulnerable and those who suffer from depression. We think especially of those at risk of physical and emotional harm. We pray for the bereaved and those who are grieving.

Loving Father, be their refuge and their strength.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

As restrictions are lifted this week, we think of the many businesses who have had to close and pray for the many who are now unemployed. A difficult year has now become even more desperate for many families. We pray for those families who are struggling to make ends meet and those who are reliant on schools and food banks to feed themselves. We give prayers of thanks to all the charities and schools that are supporting children and their families during this time. Our prayers go out to all those living with old difficulties and those living with new or added difficulties

Loving Father, be their refuge and their strength.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Our children and young people are in need of our prayers. This has been an unsettling and confusing time for them. Many are anxious and worried, their routines and education have been severely disrupted and their futures are uncertain. Although spending time at home with mum and dad has been beneficial for some, there has been a huge increase of children going into care. We pray that our children and young people will grow in confidence and their anxieties and worries will ease as lockdown ends.

Loving Father, be their refuge and their strength.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for the safety and wellbeing of all those who are working in the health service. The pressure on our doctors and nurses, our teachers and those working in our social care services has been immense throughout this pandemic. We pray that the government will keep its promises of funding for our hospitals, care homes and child services so that those who work in the care system will feel valued, supported and financially able to continue to work for the benefit of those in need of their services.

Loving Father, be their refuge and their strength.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

The world is universally suffering from the effects of the pandemic and we stand together with our brothers and sisters and pray for the best outcome for everyone. We pray for courage, strength and hope for all. We are safe in your arms Lord and trust in your will. May your people be renewed by the power of your Holy Spirit and lifted by your love.

Loving Father, be our refuge and our strength.

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers, for the sake of Your Son our Saviour, Jesus Christ.**

Amen

Collect for the day

**Almighty God,
send down upon your Church
the riches of your Spirit,
and kindle in all who minister the gospel
your countless gifts of grace;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those
who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power
and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen**

The Peace

At this point, we would normally share God's peace with each other. We cannot do that physically but please spend a few minutes now praying for specific people at St. Mary's...

Song: 873 Jesus, Restore to us again.

**Jesus, restore to us again
The gospel of your holy name
That comes with power, not words alone
Owned, signed and sealed from heaven's throne
Spirit and word in one agreed
The promise to the power wed.**

***The word is near, here in our mouths
And in our hearts, the word of faith
Proclaim it on the Spirit's breath: Jesus!***

**Your word, O Lord, eternal stands
Fixed and unchanging in the heavens
The Word made flesh, to earth come down
To heal our world with nail-pierced hands
Among us here you lived and breathed
You are the Message we received.**

***The word is near, here in our mouths
And in our hearts, the word of faith
Proclaim it on the Spirit's breath: Jesus!***

**Spirit of truth, lead us, we pray
Into all truth as we obey
And as God's will we gladly choose
Your ancient powers again will prove
Christ's teaching truly comes from God
He is indeed the living Word**

***The word is near, here in our mouths
And in our hearts, the word of faith
Proclaim it on the Spirit's breath: Jesus!***

**Upon the heights of this great land
With Moses and Elijah stand
Reveal your glory once again
Show us your face, declare your name
Prophets and law, in you complete
Where promises and power meet.**

***The word is near, here in our mouths
And in our hearts, the word of faith
Proclaim it on the Spirit's breath: Jesus!***

**Grant us in this decisive hour
To know the Scriptures and the power
The knowledge in experience proved
The power that moves and works by love
May word and works join hands as one
The word go forth, the Spirit come**

***The word is near, here in our mouths
And in our hearts, the word of faith
Proclaim it on the Spirit's breath: Jesus!***

The Blessing

**The Lord bless us and watch over us,
the Lord make his face shine upon us
and be gracious to us,
the Lord look kindly on us
and give us peace**

Go in peace to love
and serve the Lord.
In the name of Christ,
Amen.