

John 13.31-35; Acts 11.1-18; Rev.21.1-6

24th April 2016

St. Andrew's Totteridge 8:00 am & 10:00pm

Grant, O God, that in the written word, and thru' the spoken word, we may behold the living Word, our Lord & Saviour Jesus Christ.

Have you ever watched children play and witnessed how they sort things out? How they sort out the rules for the game, the play, the club they're going to start. These are usually dictated by the oldest or the most powerful personalities in the group trying to assert their will, but there's very often a few strong silent types who won't be told what to do, who insist that things have to be as 'fair' as possible. It's all fascinating stuff, and I can't help feeling that whether it's business, politics, or trade unions - local, national or international horse-trading that's going on - Brexit or Union that we're talking about - these same negotiations go on, albeit in a slightly more complex and hopefully more considerate way.

In Acts we hear about how, for the earliest Christians, the decision to include or exclude the Gentiles was a historical and significant turning point. The church had to decide whether converts had to become Jews who added Christian discipleship to Jewish law-keeping, or whether Gentiles simply moved straight into Christian fellowship without becoming Jews first. The council of Jerusalem finally settled the question in Acts 15, deciding not to burden their non-Jewish initiates with unnecessary demands, though the issue made waves for a long time to come.

So Peter relates his extraordinary vision and the point is that the rules have been changed – not by people but a vision granted from God and through the power of the Holy Spirit. Nothing is now unclean – all those old regulations have gone – no one is ever going to be excluded again by the old rules. Just as it had in Acts 2, the Spirit fell on the disciples again to make them feel sure that they were doing what God wanted. For Peter, the combination of vision and commandment from God, as well as the Lord's preparation of Cornelius and his authentication by the Holy Spirit (Acts 10.3), left no room for doubt that this was the way forward.

In John, Judas has just left the group and gone to do what he needed to do. Jesus immediately starts to explain what is happening, and two words stand out – 'glory' – the matter of being glorified – and 'love'. Both are given new meaning. The amazing claim is that the glory of God appears in the Son, the divine glory in human form, in humility, death & suffering. This is the glory of the cross. We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block and a foolishness, but to those whom God has called, the power of God and the wisdom of God (1Cor.1.23-24). We don't easily see glory in humility, do we, but Isaiah (49:3) echoes the idea of splendour in servanthood, and we can't follow Christ unless we see this.

Of course, everyone would see that we were disciples of Jesus if we really loved as he has loved us (v.34). Perhaps we glimpse a love like this most clearly in the best relationships, between parents and their small children – that unconditional love that loves no matter what. A love that loves to the end and nourishes and comforts, but which also trains and disciplines, that will go on loving sacrificially even when there is rejection and disobedience.

And then we have the imagery from Revelation, much of which comes from Isaiah – a new heaven and a new earth (65:17), the bride (62:4-5), and the end of mourning (61:3). The vision of John the Divine turns for validation to the tradition of prophecy. Here God also speaks directly, announcing himself as the ‘[Alpha and the Omega](#)’ in words that brings things full circle. But more significant still are the words that move beyond prophecy to usher in a new creation: “[See, I am making all things new](#)” (Rev.21:5).

Jesus is succinct about how the disciples are to evidence their devotion to him. They must use action – give signs – but it’s all very simple and clear really. “[Love one another](#)” (Jn.13.34). They are “[not to make a distinction between them & us](#)” (Acts 11:12). Unless they can show that what binds them is a profound, unconditional, mutual love – they will fail. No-one else will believe in God’s love for the world. “See these Christians, how they love one another,” the 2nd C Church Father Tertullian imagined pagans saying of the Christians in their midst – they would even die for one another. Love like this is the ultimate message, and it’s underwritten by the life, death and resurrection of the Word himself (John 1.1).

John 13.31-35

The New Commandment

31 When he had gone out, Jesus said, 'Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. 32 If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. 33 Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, "Where I am going, you cannot come." 34 I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'

Acts 11.1-18 Peter's Report to the Church at Jerusalem

11 Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God. 2 So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him, 3 saying, 'Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?' 4 Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step, saying, 5 'I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. There was something like a large sheet coming down from heaven, being lowered by its four corners; and it came close to me. 6 As I looked at it closely I saw four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air. 7 I also heard a voice saying to me, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat." 8 But I replied, "By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth." 9 But a second time the voice answered from heaven, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." 10 This happened three times; then everything was pulled up again to heaven. 11 At that very moment three men, sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were. 12 The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. 13 He told us how he

had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, "Send to Joppa and bring Simon, who is called Peter; 14 he will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be

saved." 15 And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. 16 And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, "John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." 17 If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?' 18 When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, 'Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life.'

Revelation 21.1-6 The New Heaven and the New Earth

21 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; 4 he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.'

5 And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new.' Also he said, 'Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.' 6 Then he said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.'

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