



COLLECT, READINGS AND REFLECTION

SUNDAY 18 MAY 2025 – Easter 5

COLLECT

Almighty God,
who through your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ
have overcome death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life:
grant that, as by your grace going before us
you put into our minds good desires,
so by your continual help
we may bring them to good effect;
through Jesus Christ our risen Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Psalm 148

1 Alleluia.
Praise the Lord from the heavens; ♦
praise him in the heights.
2 Praise him, all you his angels; ♦
praise him, all his host.
3 Praise him, sun and moon; ♦
praise him, all you stars of light.
4 Praise him, heaven of heavens, ♦
and you waters above the heavens.
5 Let them praise the name of the Lord, ♦
for he commanded and they were created.
6 He made them fast for ever and ever; ♦
he gave them a law which shall not pass away.
7 Praise the Lord from the earth, ♦
you sea monsters and all deeps;
8 Fire and hail, snow and mist, ♦
tempestuous wind, fulfilling his word;
9 Mountains and all hills, ♦
fruit trees and all cedars;
10 Wild beasts and all cattle, ♦
creeping things and birds on the wing;
11 Kings of the earth and all peoples, ♦
princes and all rulers of the world;
12 Young men and women,
old and young together; ♦
let them praise the name of the Lord.
13 For his name only is exalted, ♦
his splendour above earth and heaven.
14 He has raised up the horn of his people
and praise for all his faithful servants, ♦
the children of Israel, a people who are near him.
Alleluia.

A reading from the book of Acts, chapter 11, verses 1-18.

Acts 11. 1-18

Peter's Report to the Church at Jerusalem

Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him, saying, 'Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?' Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step, saying, '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. As I looked at it closely I saw four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air. I also heard a voice saying to me, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat." But I replied, "By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth." But a second time the voice answered from heaven, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." This happened three times; then everything was pulled up again to heaven. At that very moment three men, sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were. 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. 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; he will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved." And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. 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." 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?' 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.'

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

At Morning Prayer, the Gospel is simply the second reading, people sit to hear it and is introduced in the same way as the first:

The second reading is from John, chapter 13, verses 31-35.

and then at the end:

For the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God.

For Eucharists/ Communion people stand to hear the Gospel. Everywhere except Fitz introduces it with an Acclamation (the blue bit), and then we all use the introduction and ending (the green bit):

Alleluia. **Alleluia.**

This is the day that the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.

Alleluia.

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to John, Chapter 13, verses 31-35.

Glory to you, O Lord

And then at the end:

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

John 13. 31-35

The New Commandment

When he had gone out, Jesus said, 'Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. 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." I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'

A Reflection from Hannah

What does a typical 'churchgoer' look like? Well, if you are over 55 you are more likely to go to church. If you are older, and female you are even more likely to go to church. Our churches around the Loop bear that out. Recently (and this is very encouraging), there has also been a many-fold increase in young people going to church- particularly young men. However, if you were to ask the question of what a typical churchgoer looks like globally, the place with the most Christians in it is China- 1.3 billion (where the Christian faith is persecuted by the way). Next to that is India, with 1.2 billion. As crowds waited in the Vatican for the white smoke to rise up a few weeks ago, we had an opportunity to see the rich variety of folk representing the worldwide Roman Catholic Church- a rich tapestry of demographics.

But it gets even more complicated than that! Whilst churchgoing has been in decline in the UK for a long time, there was actually a slight increase in the past few years. Two out of every three citizens of our country say that they pray. The majority believe in a higher power. There is a searching and a longing and an openness that characterises the spiritual landscape of our society. We know that God works outside of the church as well as in it; that God comes to people in their own experiences. In acknowledging that, we see something much more hope-filled; and we begin to appreciate in new ways that Jesus really is for everyone.

Peter had to learn this too. For him and for the early church (that ragtag band of unlikely companions gathered around Jesus and following in the way), the extent of 'everyone' was an unfolding and mind-blowing reality that they kept bumping up against. It caused arguments and division at times, and it still does.

Peter had been brought up in the Jewish tradition. This meant that he was circumcised, and he had observed the Jewish food laws- strict conditions about how he ate, what he ate and who he ate with. In the vision that he describes in our passage today, God shows him all sorts of potential food and tells him he can eat it. The Jewish food laws were intimately tied to the concept of holiness- so this of course felt shocking and profane to Peter.

Peter took time to recognise that God was doing something new- something that signalled radical inclusivity, beyond the boundaries of one specific faith tradition. The Gospel was brought into being through the Jewish community. Jesus was born into it, the first followers were from it, the scriptures it held dear testified to it, but salvation was never for them alone. This is the amazing truth that we are still grappling with today. Once we know it, we can look back over the whole sweep of the story- of God's love for God's people- and see that it is there all along.

So every time we come across someone who calls on the name of the Lord and yet who is so very different to us, whose blind-spots are not ours, whose cultural background and world view seem incomprehensible; we are invited once more into the glorious mystery of the breadth, height, depth, width of Jesus' love. As brothers and sisters in Christ, may we be committed to being challenged to recognise the unbounded truth of the faith we profess and the saviour in whose footsteps we follow- as Peter did, as the early church did, as Christians around the world still do.