

## WELCOME TO...

### The Presbyterian Church of Saint David April 24, 2016



#### *Prelude*

Call to Worship: *Come, let's praise our God together!* **Angels above and sea creatures below, Rulers of earth and street people, young men and women, senior citizens and children - let's all praise God together!**

Hymn: The love of God comes close (1-3)

474

Opening Prayer: *God, who goes before us, how many times have we looked for you and not found you? How often have we felt alone and lamented your distance from us? Yet, Lord, you have always been there, and you are here now. Help us to recognize you when you show yourself but we are too blind to notice. Give us the confidence to believe that at turning points, beginnings and endings, you watch over us, but just out of sight. For you are God, and at no-one's beck and call. Yet as we gather to worship, you are in our midst. Glory be to you, O Lord.* (Church of Scotland)

Hymn: The love of God comes close (4-5)

474

Confession: *Merciful God, before we can know your renewing grace, we seek your forgiveness. We are sorry for the times someone stretched out a hand and we pretended not to notice; for the times someone wasn't perfect in our eyes and we looked away; for the times truth was on our tongues and we swallowed it instead of speaking it; for the times love was in our hearts and we were too embarrassed to express it; for the times we were prey to fears and we didn't trust you with them; for the times a stranger asked us for something and we pretended not to realise what was needed; for the times we haven't love enough and for the times we have loved with only part of ourselves; have mercy upon us, O Lord.*

**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.'

Hymn: In Christ there is no east or west (1-2)

**480**

**Context:** Peter, summoned back from Caesarea to confer with his home church at Jerusalem, is asked to explain disturbing rumours that he has been sharing meals and fellowship with non-Jews. He recounts his prayer-vision, in which he is being urged to eat what his religious convictions expressly forbid, and how this caused him to respond positively to requests from a centurion to explain the new faith. Hearing evidence that the Holy Spirit was present in the subsequent gathering convinced his fellow apostles that the new life given to them from within their own traditions was also given to others who did not share the same background.

The prominence given to this event in the book suggests that this was a live issue in the new church – the question whether the good news was for Israel or for all people regardless of who they were. That the church was still captive to the culture in which it was formed is clear from his colleagues' first question to Peter: 'Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them.' Peter is really attesting to his own further conversion to the truth of the Gospel ('who was I that I could hinder God') and his account of the occurrence and the defence of his actions helped the church turn a corner into a new realisation – almost a second Pentecost.

Additional 'proof' came from their conclusion that the initiative to receive Cornelius and his family into the church was not the result of an innovation introduced by Peter but clearly was God's doing. Had not Cornelius been visited by an angel who told him to seek out the apostle ('he told us how he had seen an angel')? and had not the experience of the Spirit come, not as a result of anything Peter had said, but rather 'as I began to speak'? If the gospel brought the conversion of these Gentiles, they in turn triggered what was no less than the conversion of the church.

- How does this story represent a total paradigm shift for Peter?

**Thought for the day:**

*Henri J M Nouwen described one of the dimensions of Reaching Out (Fount, 1980) as being 'from hostility to hospitality'. He talks of 'creating a free and friendly space', challenging our customary approaches to welcoming the guest. 'Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines. ...It is not a method of making our God and our way into the criteria of happiness, but the opening of an opportunity to others to find their God and their way. ...Hospitality is not a subtle invitation to adopt the life style of the host, but the gift of a chance for the guest to find his/her own.'*

*Wherever you find God, you find God doing a new thing. It is true: Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. But God never stands still. God is always doing a new thing, looking for fresh ideas in sharing his love and presence in our world. And God is always looking for people who are willing to journey with him into new and uncharted waters of the faith.*

*It just may be that God has a new thing in store for you, that God is wanting to do a new thing in our church. Are you ready? It may take a vision such as Peter had. Okay. Be ready for it. Be present to the Spirit of God, and you might just find God talking to you*

**Invitation:** *In the name of Jesus Christ I invite all to his table with reverence, faith, and thanksgiving. Eat and drink for your strengthening that you may grow in grace and be blessed with all spiritual blessings. **We do so remembering that we, although many, are one body in him.***

Hymn: Break now the bread of life (1-2)

**507**

Prayer of Thanksgiving: *Rejoice in the Lord always. Shout out his name. **For God is with us. Our God is with us...** the God who turns us around and offers us new life. **Rejoice in the Lord always Shout out his name** (we continue in prayer) *Pour out your Spirit upon the gifts of remembrance and the people who gather. **Come, Holy Spirit, upon us and what we do here** that these your gifts of bread and wine may be for us the body and blood of Christ so that we may bring life, hope, and love to all your world.**

Hymn: Break now the bread of life (3)

**507**

## Communion

**Following communion** *Take us to our turning point, that being filled with the Spirit, we may be empowered to reach out in love to the 'other' no matter who the 'other' may be. Give us the courage to open ourselves to your call to welcome all in your love.*

Hymn: I the Lord of sea and sky 592

*Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. May the word of Christ richly dwell within us. May we, with all wisdom, admonish one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in our hearts to God. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. Amen*

*Postlude*