

Zoom and Evening, St Matthew's 15th May 2022 – Julie Barham - Acts 11:1-18



In the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen

Today's question is – do you have dreams? Not those jolly ones about never ending libraries full of gorgeous books or train trips that serve afternoon teas or is that just in our house? No I mean dreams that are vivid, realistic and quite involving?



Well in our series of the Adventures of (Saint) Peter after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, as written about in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, we have now got to the point where he has a sort of dream. The writer says it was a trance, a sort of dream, that Peter recalls when he is challenged about bringing the good news of Jesus to Gentiles as well as the Jews. He says he saw in his trance a large – huge – sheet full of animals, creatures, reptiles and birds of all kinds being lowered in front of him. Moreover, he hears a voice from Heaven saying “Get up, Peter, kill and eat”. He refuses. He is a good Jew, he protests, who has never eaten anything against the rules, anything profane according to the rules laid down in the Torah. That was important to him.



Remember he has grown up in a Jewish family, in a synagogue community, where all the rules even about what you could and couldn't eat were

important. The fish he had caught during his previous life as a fisherman, even when he had been following Jesus, that was fine. Perhaps because he had moved and lived among Jews his entire life it had never been an issue. But now he is being told that everything is OK, everything is acceptable. It's a lot to take in, it is shaking his world to the core yet again. But it happens three times, and the voice says that "What God made clean, you must not call profane".



I feel a bit sorry for Peter at this point. Yet again, everything he has ever known, believed, even eaten, has been challenged. While he might not have been blinded on the road like Paul, or confronted by the angel Gabriel like Mary, he is challenged just as much. We could at this point think about why the food rules had been overturned by God at this point; after all I don't think Jesus had said much about the issue in his earthly life. Maybe about who it was good to eat with – answer anyone who genuinely invited him, but not what to eat.

Of course, given the context of this particular story, it is about people who were now acceptable as well as food. Peter has been challenged about the sort of people he associated with – Gentiles as well as Jews. It had been an issue during Jesus' earthly ministry – people criticised his being with, helping non Jews. After all it was the Jews who had waited, prayed for, prepared for the coming of the Messiah, not the gentiles. Peter is saying that he would no longer discriminate and goes ahead to visit a gentile home, to offer them baptism in the Holy Spirit. His listeners praise God, as they rejoice that even gentiles have been given the opportunity for repentance that leads to life.



We can be guilty of labelling people. The disabled, as if people who are living with a difference in ability to do certain things are just one huge mass of those

who use wheelchairs, when there is a diversity of disabilities just as there is a diversity of people. Refugees, who are often seen as coming from one particular country with one set of needs. When there are refugees of many types, from countries, from circumstances, even from difficult domestic situations, who can offer many gifts and abilities if just given a chance before being condemned to further hardship, even exile. The homeless, who are more than just those on the streets, but entire families without suitable safe housing, without the ability to pay for the basics of heat, light and fuel to cook. We label people too easily, without finding out what they need, and what they can offer.



Jessica walks home from the garden with her husband and children as the sun sets.

We are in Christian Aid week. It is a time when we are offered the opportunity to make the effort in time and or money to help people across the world. According to the website this is the first time in a generation when global poverty is rising - as a direct result of the pandemic, conflict in many parts of the world, and drought as a result of climate change. We are directly asked to pray and help women and men provide food for their families not just in bags of grain, but by installing water supplies, providing drought resistant seeds, introducing farming techniques so that thousands of people can eat. Their slogan is to provide hope from hunger.

By practical help, by monetary help, by prayer, we can bring hope to people in our communities and in places we will never know. Peter, Paul and the other disciples wanted to offer hope to the people they encountered on their travels. We want to offer hope to people who are near and far, as the Christian Aid website says, "Hope does not disappoint. Hope lives in you." Let's justify statement that in Christian Aid week as we can find and pass on that hope, and a bit of God's love and acceptance, as well as every other day of the year. Amen.