

## **Views from the Pews:**

### **How Peter's vision opened the Gospel to the Gentiles**

Today we read Acts 11:1-18, describing one of the most significant turning points in the development of the young church. The context is set out in the previous chapter. According to Acts 10:27-29, Peter was in Joppa, puzzling over a vision he had received from God, whose message seemed to be about a relaxation of the Jewish dietary laws. The accompanying voice invited Peter to eat, even from those species normally regarded as unclean. When Peter refused, the voice told him, repeated three times for emphasis, that 'What God has made clean, you must not call profane'.

Still 'inwardly perplexed', Peter then received a call from Cornelius, a Roman centurion in Caesarea, who had seen an equally puzzling vision, in which an angel told him to send messengers to bring Peter to Caesarea (about 50 km, or two days' journey on foot).

When Peter arrived, he found that Cornelius had called together his relatives and close friends... Peter said to them, 'You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without objection. Now may I ask why you sent for me?'

Cornelius repeated his story, and Peter took his cue. 'While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles.'

Today's reading picks up the shock-horror reaction in Judea and Jerusalem, including what might have been intended to be a dressing-down for Peter from those the text describes as 'the circumcision party'. So Peter explained the whole story again, ending with the unanswerable conclusion that God's grace has opened the Gospel to Gentiles – i.e., you and me:

'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?' ... And they praised God, saying, 'Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life.'

Alleluia!

*Kim King*