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GREETING

The Lord be with you
And also with you.

SENTENCE OF SCRIPTURE

‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me,’ says the Lord; ‘and let the one who believes in me drink. For out of your heart shall flow rivers of living water.’
John 7.38

PRAYER OF PREPARATION

Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name,
through Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE TWO GREAT COMMANDMENTS

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:
“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.
This is the great and first commandment.
And a second is like it:
You shall love your neighbour as yourself.
On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

CONFESSION

The Spirit of truth comes to convict of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment.
Let us then open our hearts and confess our sins in penitence and faith.

Merciful God,
our maker and our judge,
we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed,
and in what we have failed to do:
we have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves;
we repent, and are sorry for all our sins.
Father, forgive us.
Strengthen us to love and obey you
in newness of life;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

ABSOLUTION

Almighty God,
who has promised forgiveness to all who turn to him in faith:
pardon you and set you free from all your sins,
strengthen you in all goodness
and keep you in eternal life,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE HYMN OF PRAISE, GLORIA IN EXCELSIS

Glory to God in the highest
and peace to God's people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly King,
almighty God and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks,
we praise you for your glory.
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,
Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:
receive our prayer.
For you alone are the Holy One;
you alone are the Lord;
you alone are the Most High,
Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O God,
who taught the hearts of your faithful people
by sending to them the light of your Holy Spirit:
grant us by the same Spirit
to have a right judgement in all things,
and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort;
through the merits of Christ Jesus our Saviour,
who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the same Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

THE READINGS

1ST READING – Acts 11:1-18

PSALM 67

- 1 Let God be gracious to us and bless us:
and make his face shine upon us,
- 2 That your ways may be known on earth:
your liberating power among all nations.
- 3 Let the peoples praise you, O God:
let all the peoples praise you.

- ⁴ Let the nations be glad and sing:
for you judge the peoples with integrity,
and govern the nations upon earth.
- ⁵ Let the peoples praise you, O God:
let all the peoples praise you.
- ⁶ Then the earth will yield its fruitfulness:
and God, our God, will bless us.
- ⁷ God shall bless us:
and all the ends of the earth will fear him.

GOSPEL – John 12:20-33

SERMON – REV ANDREW GIFFORD (CMS)

Acts 11:1-18

It's good to be with you! I'm grateful to be able to connect with you again on this Pentecost Sunday. The passage (Acts 11:1-18) is not Pentecost, but it is related, because as many commentators note, there is a sense in which this passage is part of the Gentile Pentecost.

Now, Mt Eliza supported our family over many years whilst serving with CMS in Spain. Let me take you back to Spain.

Spaniards use two plates, the first for salad or vegetables, the second for meat. Put the two together and it causes tension. Maybe you've experienced similar stress points in an overseas holiday: the food, bartering, safety issues. Not just overseas - try ordering a beer in a different Australian state!

Customs reflect who we think we are, that's why they are important and cause stress when they are challenged. The ethnic make-up of Mt Eliza is 89% English-speaking as first language. When new neighbours move in, and they're not from your tribe, it can be stressful. These are emotional issues because they are issues of identity. We are made to seek belong; natural structures that God has put into the world make this obvious, like family. God is relational.

So, feel the tension of the Jews, verses 2-3: "So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticised him and said, 'You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.'"

The Jews have a remarkable history, right back to Abraham. This included special promises: to be a blessing for the nations. God set them apart to be a light to the nations, so that they might draw the nations to God. This came with external signs of being set apart and "purity". Circumcision and eating are both mentioned here. Peter knew this emotional tension - verse 10: "This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again." Why three times? Well as Peter responds - surely not would he eat these animals! (verse 8). Remember this whole episode is about whether that person over there, the person not like me culturally, can be acceptable to God whom I worship. You might be saying, "Of course they can be acceptable to God... and then they will look like us."

When new neighbours move in, and they're not from our tribe, do we think that if they follow Jesus they should fit into our way of expression? This is emotional!

The Book of Acts describes to us the first generation who decided to follow Jesus. In essence there are no second generation Christians, we all make the decision to follow Christ. We are all first generation. We repeat this story - our struggles are the same. If you find this emotional, be assured that the first generation felt the same. This struggle should alert us to the fact that if there is to be true acceptance then it must be a work of God, not of humans. Why? Because we are tribal and the only way that we can be truly changed is by our Creator. If you find this hard, so did Peter! Yet, when Peter caught God's vision, he changed.

If you're not sure about Christianity I'm glad you're reading this. You may be thinking, "but multiculturalism doesn't need religion; often religion makes the divide worse." I agree with you. Multiculturalism doesn't need religion, it needs Jesus.

Multiculturalism is a western phenomenon because of Jesus. In fact, the reason that multiculturalism has stalled is because we think we can do it without Jesus. Let me show you why.

What should intrigue us is the absolute change that comes about in the lives of the Jews who accuse Peter (v2) and then praise God (v18). What caused these critical Jews to become Jews who warmly embraced these Gentiles, their mortal enemies? It wasn't an education campaign, it wasn't the evolution of the species, it wasn't rational thinking, it wasn't a persuasive speaker. It was God taking everything that has represented their purity and putting it straight into their very soul. That's the heart of the vision that Peter is given.

Circumcision and food were external signs of their purity and being set apart. God took those ideas and offered them as the internal reality. That's what's explained in verse 16: *Then I remembered what the Lord had said: "John baptised with water, but you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit."* John called attention to the need to be cleaned and so he immersed those who responded in water, an external cleaning. But Jesus took this further, because he knew we need an internal cleaning, by his Spirit, immersed in Him.

The vision of Christianity is this profound. If the sign of identity remains external then they have to be maintained externally and that's the limit of the work. That's really what secular multiculturalism achieves. We only exchange ideas; you explain your beliefs and I explain mine and we have a healthy respect for each other. I can dress in your clothes to identify with you, but that is still external. In fact, in religion conformity is always expected. Convert to Islam, Buddhism, convert to a Green Agenda, convert to living in Mt Eliza: all of these expect conformity.

The radical offer of Jesus is that he wants to take the signs of identity into our very soul. He wants us to have his Spirit in us. That's what the account of the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus is showing us.

This is the way of life; I want Jesus to lead me in this kind of life that actually knows no end. So when Peter comes with this message, verse 14, and as Cornelius and his household hear this message, these gentiles have the same internal experience as the Jewish Christians had at Pentecost, verse 15. The message of Jesus transforms them internally! They are still Gentiles! They did not have to conform on the outside to be accepted by Jesus.

What that means is that I am no longer controlled by externals. That is true Christian Freedom! Have we experienced this?

God dwelling, accepting me through the life-saving message of Jesus. Can humanism do this? Look at where multiculturalism has actually worked - countries affected by Jesus. The extent to its working is reflective to the extent that the message of Jesus has been accepted. As that influence recedes, so does multiculturalism. Tribal tension increases when the real internal change of Jesus recedes.

It's quite possible to use Christianity as an external weapon of conformity, there are plenty of examples of this. But that's surely not what we see happening in this episode with Cornelius! Christians don't always get this right. Priestly clothing historically came from the Roman toga, and then at some point it got stuck and became a new symbol of a separate class of Christian. We foisted that onto the African church, for example. African clergy dress, derived from the Ancient Roman tunic!

In contrast Hudson Taylor in the 1800s went to China and chose to dress like the "enemy" to focus the message of Jesus on the internal change. Surely this confirms the miracle of the gospel. When the change is internal, the Christians get it right!

God was at work first in this internal renewal: God went to Cornelius. That allows us to be bold and leave behind our external culture like Peter, like Hudson. I don't need to change you: God can.

That means no more manipulation to my way of life, only invitation to a new tribe through the message of Jesus.

In all of this Jesus is the key for internal change; it's his message (v14) working internally (v 17). In verse 18, the word for "repent" (Greek - *metanoia*), means change the way you think. The word "life" is the Greek word "zoe" which focuses on the soul. "Repentance unto life" (v 18) means the message of Jesus has transformed our thinking so that our very soul is renewed. Not my tribe, not yours, but Jesus! What Jesus hangs loose with, so do we. Christians should lead in true multiculturalism.

You may have heard Kate and Tavis Beer's story working with Aborigines at SUTS. The story of the Yarning Map is a wonderful example of what it looks like to relive the Cornelius episode today. The map helps with the professional development of Aboriginal ministers. The video of the talk is available on the CMS website, but you'll need a password. Email vic@cms.org.au for the password.

As you watch it you'll realise that it's still true today, that the internal change of Jesus is what motivates CMS workers. That's why our workers train at St Andrew's Hall for six months, so that what we take with us is not our culture but the incredible life-changing message that Jesus brings to our souls.

What about where you are at Mt Eliza? Are you comfortable with the idea that there are more Chinese-speaking Christians than English-speaking Christians?

There are already more Chinese at church on a Sunday than in the whole of Europe. Will you rejoice, as the first believers did, when they realised what this means? Have we gone through the transformation of the Jews and Peter?

The steps are:

- Accept that this is an emotional issue: do I want to belong to the tribe of Jesus?
- Be immersed in the reality of Jesus: life, death, resurrection and ascension.
- Experience the resulting joy - that's when you know you're with Jesus in this! When every tribe and nation loves the one true God who already loves them dearly, not by the externals, but in our very souls.

INTERCESSIONS – by Sam White

Lord our God, we thank you that you are always with us, when we feel your presence and when we mourn the loss of a closeness to you and to each other. We thank you for wisdom bestowed upon many of those in positions of power and authority. Give all those who lead, in whatever capacity, a spirit of love and compassion and the desire to do all things through you who makes all things possible. Lord, some are called to lead and many are called to follow, help us all to follow you and to use wisdom and discernment when listening to the words of those around us and especially when reading and hearing things on social media.

Merciful God, our hearts are troubled when we look around the world at those who have little and whose very lives are threatened by war, by disease and by the destruction of the living environment around them. Help us to recognise their suffering and to work towards creating a world where all can share equally in your bountiful goodness, where all are safe and where all people and all of creation have what they need.

Lord our God, today we celebrate Pentecost in a very different way to how we normally can. We are unable to gather together physically as your people, but we still choose to pause and remember this time. We remember how your people went out and spoke your word and all who heard it understood. We pray for that to happen here in our time, that we might be able to spread your word to all those around us and that their hearts and minds might be opened to you, that everyone might turn again to you.

Through these troubled times, where we have paused and shifted our priorities, many of us have realised that we can do without a lot of material things but that we miss the companionship of others in our lives. Help us to rebuild our communities and our world with a renewed sense of what really matters and what really deserves our attention.

Merciful God, your love never leaves us. Be a comforting presence to those who are ill, for those who are dying, for those struggling to cope, that they may experience the fullness of the hope found through your Spirit. We pray for carers around the world, that they, too, may know your presence, and experience new stamina and purpose in their attention to the needs of others. We remember those who have gone before us, especially those known to us whose anniversary falls at this time.

Lord be with us all, now, and forever, and accept our prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.

GREETING OF PEACE

We are the body of Christ.
His Spirit is with us.
The peace of the Lord be always with you.
And also with you.

OFFERTORY PRAYER

Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation.
Through your goodness we have these gifts to share.
Accept and use our offerings for your glory
and for the service of your kingdom.
Blessed be God for ever.

OPENING (GREAT THANKSGIVING)

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.
Lift up your hearts.
We lift them to the Lord.
Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right to give our thanks and praise.

All glory and honour, be yours now and always, mighty Creator, everliving God. We give you thanks and praise for your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, who by the power of your Spirit was born of Mary and lived as one of us. By his death on the cross and rising to new life, he offered the one true sacrifice for sin and obtained an eternal deliverance for his people.

Today we give you thanks that in fulfilment of your promise you pour forth your Spirit upon us, filling us with gifts and leading us into all truth. You give us power to proclaim your gospel to all nations and to serve you as a royal priesthood. Therefore, we lift our voices to praise you, saying,

Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.

And now we thank you for these gifts of bread and wine; may we who receive them, as Jesus said, share his body and his blood.

On the night he was betrayed, he took bread and gave you thanks.
He broke the bread and gave it to his friends, and said,
‘Take and eat. This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’

After supper he took the cup and gave you thanks.
He shared the cup with them and said,
‘This is my blood poured out so that sins may be forgiven.
Do this in remembrance of me.’

Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.

You have gathered us together to feed on Christ and to remember all he has done for us:

Fill us with your Spirit that we may follow Jesus in all we do and say, working for justice and bringing your peace to this world that you have made.

Accept our prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Blessing and honour and glory and power
are yours for ever and ever. Amen.**

THE BREAKING AND SHARING OF THE BREAD AND WINE

**We break this bread to share in the body of Christ. We who are many are one body,
for we all share in the one bread.**

AFTER COMMUNION

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

**We believe in God above us,
maker and sustainer of all life,
of sun and moon,
of water and earth,
of male and female.**

**We believe in God beside us,
Jesus Christ, the word made flesh,
born of a woman, servant of the poor,
tortured and nailed to a tree.
A man of sorrows, he died forsaken.
He descended into the earth
to the place of death.
On the third day he rose from the tomb.
He ascended into heaven
to be everywhere present,
and his kingdom will come on earth.**

**We believe in God within us,
the Holy Spirit of Pentecostal fire,
life-giving breath of the Church,
Spirit of healing and forgiveness,
source of resurrection and of eternal life. Amen.**

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POST COMMUNION PRAYER

**Giver of life and love,
we thank you that in this heavenly banquet
you invigorate and renew us.
Living in the unity of the Spirit,
may we boldly use your gifts
to continue your work in the world.**

**Most loving God,
you send us into the world you love.
Give us grace to go thankfully and with courage in the power of your Spirit.**

BLESSING

**God stir up within you the gift of the Spirit
that you may confess Jesus Christ as Lord
and proclaim the joy of the everlasting gospel wherever you may be;
and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be upon you and
remain with you always. Amen.**

DISMISSAL

**We go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
In the name of Christ. Amen.**