

New Horizons and the Holy Spirit.

Acts 10:34-48;

Introduction.

Janice and I have discovered a new way of taking long journeys, at least we had until the Covid Crisis. It is audio books to be listened to on long trips, to Queensland, Parkes in the Central Western District and to Temora in the Riverina and South Western Slopes region of NSW. We are enthralled by stories with observations of the environments through which we drive. I do not think we are unusual and we know we are doing an adult version of what many young families do on journeys. We arrive enlivened and having enjoyed the journey all the more because of the stories we have become involved in.

I am convinced that human beings are 'story sustained creatures'. We love hearing stories through which we learn and become informed by the stories of others, whether or not they are intended to teach us or simply to entertain us. The events of this section of Acts of the Apostles chapter 10 is a beautiful example of such a story. What's more the story is an important **formative story** for the future Christian congregations across the world through the generations. It is in fact a kind of different second pentecost¹ that can easily get overlooked by parochial congregations and individuals.

The Lord Jesus told stories of great significance and not always with an interpretation but with a central point in every case. The gospel writers tell stories about him and not always from the exact same perspective. The Apostles set out to tell a central story about Jesus as they began the business of taking the news of Jesus to an every larger world audience.

However, even when their stories of Jesus were shared with non Jews they included the story of God's activities in the world and particularly with God's people, the Hebrews or Jews. That is the descendants of Abraham who God chose to take the news of God's place in the world, and his activities to the remainder of humanity with the agenda of persuading them to become God fearers, or people who worshipped God and follow his directives about doing life with justice, loving and practicing mercy and walk humbly with God which included being humble and respectful of other people groups and of individuals.

As at the Day of Pentecost so here when addressing Cornelius and his friends, gentiles all Peter includes the Jewish story and brings it to a climax but speaking of Jesus, God's Messiah or anointed one. This is a purely 'Gentile Pentecost'². It is Jesus the Christ, God the Son who brings to peace and forgiveness to people who turning to him in repentance and trust (43).

1. The Shape of the Peter's Story.

Being well acquainted with Cornelius' story Peter knew that he was a so called God fearer, attached to and generous in his support of the local Jewish synagogue. To him and his colleagues Peter declared a number of things about Jesus

- God **sent a message of peace through Jesus.**³ when Jesus announced God's kingdom, he did so at a time when the Jews lived in troubled times where some parochial nationalist expected an imminent armed revolt against Rome. Contrary to this popular sense Jesus came as a living message of peace and urged his disciples to do the same. Whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace to this house! And if

¹ Frederick Dale Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1970

² C S C Williams, *The Acts of the Apostles*, London: Adam and Black 1957, 138

³ Tom Wright, *Acts for Everyone*, Part 1 chapters 1-12; London: SPCK 2008, 129

anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person;but if not it will return to you” (Luke 10:5-6).

- **God anointed Jesus** God did this as the Lord was anointed by the holy Spirit at his baptism in the Jordan. the word Messiah, means ‘the anointed one’ Jesus is king even though he did not look much like a king to human observers
- **God was with Jesus.** God accompanied his son throughout his ministry just as he had promised at the burning bush to be with Moses throughout his leadership, And Joshua, and Gideon, and Samuel, and other servants of the Lord who served Israel in prophecy of as genuine servant godly kings throughout their leadership of the people of Israel, So god was with his incarnate son , Jesus. As he taught, and as he did demonstrated miraculous signs and wonders, and as he died his death for humankind, and as was demonstrated in Jesus’ resurrection from the dead,.
- **In fact God raised Jesus from the dead.** Thus demonstrating the he is ‘Lord of all’ (36). This is a central affirmation of Peter’s message to Cornelius and his colleagues.
- **God chose the apostles us to witness to him** and in turn those who heeded their messages also to advertise Jesus’ love, grace and Lordship and transformative agenda. God directed the apostle Peter to preach and teach as he does pastors and teacher today as they live with Christ central in their relationships, actions and attitudes and ministries.
- **God ordained Jesus as judge of the living and the dead.** Peter is telling Cornelius and his guests that while it was great that Cornelius was a god fearer standing at the door looking deeply into god’s work among his people. He had caught glimpses of God’s work but now he was not to stand outside the door anymore, but to come in as one who is answerable to Jesu the judge, and one who is to receive forgiveness and peace with God because of Jesus. This is a realisation that vision

that god had given Abraham’s descendants, Israel, that the whole world, not just those who were religiously Jews but gentiles too, from every nation and every language show come to call Jesus as Lord and saviour.

2. The Outcome of the Peter’s story

The outcome of Peter’s preaching is remarkable. Cornelius and those who with him are open to the Peter’s preaching don’t even get to enunciate their acceptance of this truth, their belief or their intention to turn to Jesus in repentance and trust, before the spirit of God falls on them. They begin immediately to speak in tongues as happened on the day of Pentecost to people from numerous nations. The accompanying phenomena of speaking in tongues reinforced to those who accompanied Peter that the Spirit of God could lead people who were not Jewish by religion, who were purely gentile could be converted to Christian faith. Remember that the people in Jerusalem on the day of pentecost were there to celebrate a Jewish religious festival of great importance, in other words although they were from many nations, inlaced northern African nations they were Jewish by religion, where here in this event the recipients were not Jewish by religion at all, they were in the process of turning their backs on all other faiths to trust entirely in Jesus the Messiah and son of God.

Note that this event like the one on Pentecost was not an individual experience but a group experience, a whole lot of people spoke in tongues. ***‘Speaking in tongues in Acts is on all three occasions a corporate, church founding, group conversion phenomena and not a the subsequent Spirit experience of an individual that it became in later church history’⁴***. The reception of the Holy Spirit by these gentiles marks the end of religious particularism. Faith in the Messiah was no longer to be regarded as the privilege of Jews only, **Peter saw the fulfilment of his dream, no things that God regarded as clean, like these born again gentiles were be treated as unclean.** The were not excluded, they were

⁴ Brunner, 1970 192

included. Racial discrimination of racial superiority has no place in the community of people who follow Jesus. There are more believers in the contemporary world who are not white caucasians than there are white people. Exclusivity of race is out. Universal embracing of people who walk with Jesus is required from God's people!⁵

God welcomed Gentiles into God's people so it was now the responsibility to of the church to include these people by baptising them. Baptism was an outward sign of the inner working of God in the lives of new converts.

Baptism speaks powerfully of cleansing from sin and forgiveness *'Peter said to them "Repent and be Baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit". (ACTS 2:38).*

There is no objection and the believers are baptised. as there would nothing to prevent the Ethiopian Eunuch from being baptised by Philip after he led the man to faith in Christ (Acts 8: 26ff). Incidentally, there is no mention of the northern African speaking in tongues, his confession of faith was genuine. Cornelius and his gentile colleagues were not circumcised after they came to faith, the sign of baptism was enough for the Christian community (Matt 12:39; 16:4; John 4:48;7:3-6).

3. The Implications for the Contemporary Congregational Practice.

- Tongues were a sign in demonstrating to the sceptical 'circumcision party' within the early church that the occasion of Gentile initiation was no less auspicious than the Jewish initiation. Speaking in tongues at Pentecost and here at Caesarea 'were a sign not because they were expected, required, or usual, but precisely were unexpected, unrequited and unusual convincing even the most hard necked that

⁵ I. Howard Marshall, Acts, Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980, 194-195.

⁶ Brunner, 1979, 192.

God wanted Gentiles as well as Jews among God's people. The clear emphasis of the New Testament is that the need for the spectacular is more often a feature of unbelief than of belief, for in the words which are often treated " An evil and adulterous generation seek for sign⁶.

- Much more importantly this story's a point that we need never lose sight of and that is that the believers in Jesus are to be racially inclusive. in our compassionate action, evangelism and integration of people into the family of God. We are to do this better than any other part of society affirming the faith, giving the respect and honouring each other humbly in the Lord. We are to be counter cultural in our inclusion of all languages and cultures and are to reject all elitism just as God, the Father, son and Holy Spirit do.