

Hello everyone

Does Simon the Tanner live here?

It's simple, everyday kind of question isn't it?

I'm sure you've asked somebody a similar type of question on a doorstep at some point in your life.

Yes, it's a simple question, but in God's hands it has momentous consequences.

It's a question asked by three friends sent to Joppa from Caesarea by Cornelius a captain in the Italian cohort.

The question is really not a simple, it is asked in response to obeying a command from God.

Cornelius was told by God to send people to the house of Simon the Tanner.

And in faith he does just that.

And in faith three people go off to a strange city, a strange house to find someone they don't know who hopefully will introduce them to someone they have never met called Peter who might have a message for them.

You or I might have been a bit nervous, but the friends march up to the door and ask

Does Simon the Tanner live here?

And is Peter a guest?

It turns out that they have picked the right house.

But more than that it turns out that like Cornelius, Peter has been speaking with god too.

At first Peter was not happy with what God was asking. Go and speak with a Gentile. That's just not what we do God, but God reminds Peter that they are all aprt of his flock, even Gentiles like Cornelius who has felt God's presence with him and is living as Jesus had asked us to by helping out neighbours.

Is this the house of Simon the Tanner and is Peter here?

It sounds a little bit like the little boy holding his bike and asking can Peter come out to play?

Peter comes downstairs, he's not sure what to do, but God has told him to welcome these guests, so he does. But it's not a very enthusiastic welcome is it?

You're looking for me, he tells Cornelius' unnamed friends.

Luke doesn't name the people who are sent by Cornelius, allowing us to put ourselves in the group if we want to. Later on we will get a chance to be part of the unnamed believers who accompany Peter back to Caesarea. Luke leaves space in the story for us to take part. Maybe we should think about how we would have reacted? How we would tell the story to our friends later.

Why are you hear he continues a little ungraciously it seems.

Cornelius' friends though are not put off. They talk of angels in Caesarea giving them direction from God and well---now we're her eand there I'm done. – to paraphrase part of the Gondoliers by G and S.

Obviously, Peter links this to his recent dream on the roof where God tells him he is to go on a journey.

IT's a theme that Luke is fond of. The mission of Israel to the nations of the world is always directed by God and what's got to happen on Earth has already been

debated and discussed in heaven from the point of view of all participants whether Jew or Gentile.

There is a plan for spreading the good news and God is in control of showing us how to implement it.

Come on, says Peter and the next day Peter travels to Caesarea with Cornelius' friends and some of his own; unnamed.

Luke loves to ensure that we know these momentous moments are witnessed.

Are you standing in that group?

For these are momentous moments. What happens next goes against all that Peter has been taught his whole life.

He enters the house of a non Jew- a Gentile.

Scandalous. That was supposed to be forbidden by God.

But Peter does it and barriers are broken down.

All because Peter had been told by God in a dream that he, Peter, was not the one who decided what was right and what was wrong.

Peter enters the house and ask how he can help?

I'm glad you could come says Cornelius.

I'm so excited that we who are so different are united with God and you can tell me what you have discovered about God.

Peter says, when it comes to God; he sees all people as equal. God loves everyone who is filled with awe of him and who is committed to working for justice regardless of which nation they are from.

There Luke goes again the two important commandments in operation are what is important.

Love the Lord your god with all your heart, soul, strength and mind and your neighbour as yourself.

I've been sent here to fill you in with the story and how Jesus fits into it, says Peter.

Jesus was anointed by God and went about doing good things.

I witnessed that

I also was at the empty tomb three days after Jesus had been killed.

I was part of the group who Jesus appeared to after his death too and he asked me to telling others that story. We call it spreading the good news.

And we know God approves because the Holy Spirit is poured out over all in the house. It's a common occurrence in Luke's writing. Remember Mary singing My soul shall magnify the lord

But there is a big but to this story. Just because like Mary you praise God doesn't mean you will have an easy life. After all Cornelius you are dislodging your emperor from the place of god.

Then we see the church in action. Baptising with water and eating together.

Is that Luke hinting at the sacraments we participate in today?

For us today it does seem a simple story and we maybe think we've heard it many times before. But in the story of the New Testament, this is a massive leap. Christianity is about to embrace all nations and all because of the faithfulness of two people- Cornelius and Peter.

As we look at the story today, we feel the reassurance of god's promise to be with us always as we spread his good news and he will provide us with people to help us out practically when we need them, but God will also challenge us like he did Peter and Cornelius to step out of our comfort zones and embrace new ways of living and new ways of spreading God's message.

It turns out that this big reassuring God has the good of everyone at heart and quite amazingly has picked each of us to help him spread his message.

Who will you tell this week that God treats everyone alike?

And how will you show it in your life?

Peace be with You

Amen