

Family Worship – Sunday 7th June 2020

Good morning everyone! Thank you for joining us this week as we spend some time together as families and individuals in worship. We hope you'll find the contents of this "Family Worship" outline meaningful and helpful as we meet 'together' in our various home settings and discover lessons to be learned from the life experiences of the apostle Peter.

If you have internet access, here's a song to enjoy together – it's a great song of praise that declares "I want to see you". It's called "Open the eyes of my heart Lord" and you can watch/listen/join in here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sh30xwmJ-x0>

If you don't have internet access, please play a suitable track from one of your CDs.

Please pray together, thanking God for how he pours out his power and love for our benefit in all sorts of ways in our everyday lives – and especially in sending Jesus to be our Saviour. Ask him to be with us and to open the eyes of our hearts so that we can see what he's saying to us through the Bible passage we're looking at this morning.

This week, our Youth Worker, Hayley Cullen, has another story for our children from the "Jesus Storybook Bible" – it's called "A little girl and a poor frail lady" and it tells of how Jesus was able to help both of them enjoy new life. You can find Hayley's video on our Facebook page: www.facebook.com/muckamorepc

Bible Reading: Acts 9:32-10:8

If there's more than one of you, maybe you could take it in turn to read a verse or two each?

If you have internet access, please go to our Facebook page where you will find a video from Peter that includes the sermon and a prayer. The video can be found here:

www.facebook.com/muckamorepc

If you don't have internet access, here's Peter's sermon for you to read:

Acts 9:32-10:8 "The trouble God goes to for us"

Hey, young folks – have you ever overheard your mum talking on the phone to a friend who's asking all of you to come round to their house for a meal and your mum says, "Aw, that would be lovely; we'd love to come but listen, now; don't you be going to a lot of trouble, sure you won't? Something simple will be lovely". And then you get there and you sit down at the table and the food's brought in – wow! You can hardly believe your eyes there's so much of it – starters, main course and desserts – boy, are you glad you came! And your mum says, "I thought I told you not to go to any trouble!" and her friend just smiles and says, "I didn't really".

Do you realise that God is so keen for us to let him have his rightful place in our lives that he's prepared to go to a lot of trouble to get us there! If ever there's a story that makes that clear to us, it's the one involving Peter and a man called Cornelius. Granted, God goes to **exceptional** lengths in this story, but it shows us just how much trouble he's prepared to go at times to get us to see our need of him.

He begins by reminding Peter of things he'd experienced during the time he'd spent with Jesus as one of his disciples.

First, as he's travelling around the country, Peter comes to the town of Lydda and there he discovers a man who'd become disabled and been bedridden for 8 years. Presumably, the man was lying on his mat at the side of the street as Peter walked through the town and when he saw him, he remembered that he'd seen people like this before with Jesus a few times and, so, he did what he'd seen Jesus do – "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and tidy up your mat". And the man does – just as the others had done when Jesus had told them something similar. And when all the people of Lydda saw that the man was able to walk again, they turned to the Lord – they welcomed him into their lives.

The second thing that happened was again similar to something Peter had seen before with Jesus. A lovely lady, called Tabitha, who lived in Joppa and was well-known for doing good and helping poor people in her local community, had fallen seriously ill and died. Some folks who'd already become followers of Jesus heard that Peter was still in Lydda just a short distance away, so they sent a couple of messengers to ask him to come and help her. When Peter got there, he did what he'd seen Jesus do a couple of years earlier when he'd been asked to go to help the young girl who'd fallen very sick and died – the story that Hayley read for the children this morning. Peter sent everyone out of the room where Tabitha was lying on the bed, got down on his knees and prayed, and then spoke directly to her: "Tabitha, get up". She opened her eyes and when she saw Peter she sat up. Peter helped her to her feet and then called the people back in and showed them that she was alive! Well, you can imagine how people in Joppa reacted to what had happened – many of them believed in Jesus and welcomed him into their lives, too.

Peter decided to stay on in Joppa for a while – we're not told why – maybe he just fancied the idea of staying near the sea for a while – remember, he'd been a fisherman most of his life and for somebody who's used to the sea, it can be very hard to get it out of your system! Maybe he was just taking up a very kind offer of hospitality from a man called Simon who lived in the town. Maybe he felt God wanted him to stay there but had no idea why – but something told him it was what God wanted him to do. You know, God does that sometimes; prompts us to do something for no obvious reason but we have this sense that it's what he wants us to do – and all the time he's using those very moments in his grand scheme of things so far as his purposes for us, the people around us and the work of the Kingdom are concerned. So it was with Peter. Joppa was about 40 miles from Caesarea. Caesarea was where Cornelius lived and God was about to bring Peter and him together in a life changing experience for both of them. But, first, he had a little eye-opening work to do on Peter – you read about it in Acts 10:9-23.

We're told that Peter went up on the roof of Simon's house to pray. It was midday and between hunger and the heat of the sun, Peter did what he was quite good at when it came to praying – he fell asleep. Many of us share his weakness, don't we? This time, however, God spoke to him while he was sleeping, through a dream, indirectly reminding him of things he'd experienced during the time he'd spent with Jesus. The dream began with a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners – was God taking him back to the day when four friends had let a paralysed man down by the four corners of his mat through the roof of a house to the feet of Jesus so he could be healed? Was God taking him back to what Jesus had taught everyone present that day about the authority vested in him as the Son of God? It wasn't a man on the mat this time but all kinds of animals that we're told were suitable for eating, though Peter didn't seem to agree with that because when he was told to get up and select whatever he wanted on the mat and make himself something to eat he protested "no"; nothing that wasn't 'kosher' had ever crossed his lips. The voice replied – *"If God says it's okay, it's okay"* as The Message translation puts it. And then we're told – *"This happened three times and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven"*. Three times – remember, this is Peter here. Three times – back to the courtyard at Caiaphas' house where Jesus was on trial and Peter denied being one of his disciples three times. Three times – back to the shore of the lake where the resurrected Jesus cooked breakfast and told Peter three times "Feed my sheep". Peter woke with a start – what could it mean? As he was trying to work it out, **three** men arrived at the house, calling out at the gate to ask if he was there. Peter, still up on the roof at the time, probably heard them and as he listened to what they were saying, the Holy Spirit spoke to him – *"Simon" – isn't that the name Jesus had used so often when he'd been speaking personally to Peter? "Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up – oh, he'd been told to do that in the dream – get up and go downstairs; don't hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them"*. Peter went down to them and asked them why they'd come. *"We've come from Cornelius the*

centurion" – that's what **we** hear but Peter heard something different – centurion meant Roman meant Gentile meant 'not kosher' to Peter. But this was no ordinary Gentile the men told him – *"he is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people"*. Peter listened as the men continued: *"A holy angel told Cornelius to have you come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say"*. Is this what Jesus had been telling Peter that day on the beach when he said, "Feed my sheep"? Is this what God was telling him through the dream – not to think of Cornelius as 'not kosher'? Peter got the message okay and the very next day he set out for Caesarea and a meeting with Cornelius – and we'll find out what happened when he got there in a couple of weeks' time, God willing. But can you now see what I meant earlier when I said that this story is a great example of the lengths to which God is willing to go, the trouble he's willing to take, to help us realise our need of him? Our need to allow him to have his rightful place in our lives? Our need for forgiveness and being made right with him? He's prepared to go to enormous lengths to get us there! Look at the trouble he went to for Cornelius – prompting Peter to stay in Joppa for a while; speaking to Peter through that dream; getting those men to travel all the way to Joppa, arriving just as Peter was trying to make sense of his dream; having Peter make a 40 mile journey all the way to Caesarea – not to mention what the Lord was doing in Caesarea at the same time with an angel appearing to Cornelius and so on – God did all of this so that Cornelius could hear the good news about Jesus and welcome him into his life. Yes, God goes to exceptional lengths in this story, but it shows us just how much trouble he's prepared to go at times to get people to see their need of him and welcome him into our lives – people like you and me. We mightn't see it like that, of course. We maybe just think we're only doing what we feel to be right – going to church on Sundays (until lockdown came along!); getting married in church; bringing our children to church organisations. But could the Lord be prompting us to do these things because he wants us to see our need of him? Maybe we think it's just a coincidence that our best mate at school is a Christian or that we find ourselves working with a colleague who's a Christian or that we become friendly with someone who's a Christian. Maybe he's using lockdown to prompt us because it gives us more time to think about the important things of life; or we find ourselves watching videos of someone preaching on Sundays... Could God be prompting us through these kind of things because he **so** wants us to see our need of him and welcome him into our lives? He's gone to great lengths to show us just how much he wants that for us - he sent Jesus to be our Saviour, to take the punishment we deserve for the way we think we can live without God; without listening to what he says; without paying any attention to him or allowing him to have any place or part in our lives. Jesus was willing to die on a cross so that we could be forgiven and made right with God and know his grace and his love and his peace and his joy within us. If you feel God is prompting you to respond to all that God has been doing to help you see your need of him, to make things right with him, to welcome him into your life, you could simply ask him by saying something like this to him: *"Heavenly Father, I'm sorry for the way I've been living and ask you to forgive me. Help me to turn my back on my wrong ways because I want to live for you. Thank you for sending Jesus to die for me so that I can be forgiven. Please come into my life by your Holy Spirit and change me so that I live for you. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen"*. If you'd like to pray that prayer, you'll find it included in the worship outline that goes along with this video. And if you use it, please let me know so I can encourage you and help you some more. And if you've already prayed a prayer like that some time ago, give thanks to God for the trouble he went to in helping you see your need to be made right with him and for sending Jesus to be your Saviour.

It makes no difference who we are or where we're from or what we can or cannot do - if we want God and are ready to welcome him into our lives, the door is open.

Now watch/listen/sing along with this song in which we say: “All that I have I lay at the feet of the wonderful Saviour who loves me” – it’s called “Wonderful Grace” and here’s the link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdugliaCXUk>

If you don’t have internet access, please play a suitable track from one of your CDs.

Please pray for others as you finish:

- 1) give thanks for the reduction in the numbers of deaths and infection rates resulting from Covid-19. Continue to pray for individuals and families who have been bereaved or have loved ones ill in hospital or residential homes due to the virus;
- 2) continue to pray for NHS and Social Care staff who are caring for people with the virus; not forgetting the many patients in their care with other serious health conditions;
- 3) pray for families who’ve been bereaved during the period of lockdown and who’ve been unable to support one another in person or have other people express their love and sympathy in the normal ways;
- 4) pray that people will follow the various regulations aimed at bringing us out of lockdown gradually and without causing a spike in virus infections so that businesses, schools and churches can be reopened safely as soon as possible;
- 5) pray for the members of our congregation as we continue to be ‘scattered’ instead of ‘together in one place’ and that as many as possible will be able to share in family worship through the videos on Facebook, the CD recordings or the printed materials being produced.

Thanks for following this outline for Family Worship – may you know God’s presence and sustaining grace with you in the week ahead.