

## Morning Prayer 9<sup>th</sup> May 2021

### The Sixth Sunday of Easter

### Morning Worship with Peter Widdess



### Personal preparation before the service begins.

Please take time to remember wherever you are, we are all in the presence of God as one community. Give thanks and become still in the presence of God

### Prelude

### Greeting

Alleluia. Christ is risen.  
He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

### Song: Come As You Are

Come as you are  
That's how I want you  
Come as you are  
Feel quite at home  
Close to My heart  
Loved and forgiven  
Come as you are  
Why stand alone

No need to fear  
Love sets no limits  
No need to fear  
Love never ends  
Don't run away  
Shamed and disheartened  
Rest in My love  
Trust Me again

I came to call sinners  
Not just the virtuous  
I came to bring peace  
Not to condemn  
Each time you fail  
To live by My promise  
Why do you think  
I'd love you the less

Come as you are  
That's how I love you  
Come as you are  
Trust Me again  
Nothing can change  
The love that I bear you  
All will be well  
Just come as you are

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## Let us pray with words from Psalm 98

Sing to the Lord a new song,  
**for he has done marvellous things;**  
his right hand and his holy arm  
**have worked salvation for him.**  
The Lord has made his salvation known  
**and revealed his righteousness to the nations.**  
He has remembered his love  
**and his faithfulness to Israel;**  
all the ends of the earth have seen  
**the salvation of our God.**  
Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth,  
**burst into jubilant song with music;**  
make music to the Lord with the harp,  
**with the harp and the sound of singing,**  
with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn—  
**shout for joy before the Lord, the King.**  
Let the sea resound, and everything in it,  
**the world, and all who live in it.**

Let the rivers clap their hands,  
**let the mountains sing together for joy;**  
let them sing before the Lord,  
**for he comes to judge the earth.**  
He will judge the world in righteousness  
**and the peoples with equity.**

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,  
and to the Holy Spirit,  
**As it was in the beginning,**  
**is now and shall be for ever.**

### **The Collect for today, the sixth Sunday of Easter**

God our redeemer,  
you have delivered us from the power of darkness  
and brought us into the kingdom of your Son:  
grant, that as by his death he has recalled us to life,  
so by his continual presence in us he may raise us to  
eternal joy;  
through Jesus Christ your son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and forever.  
**Amen.**

### **The reading is taken from the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 10.**

Let us prepare ourselves for the word of God  
**Our hearts and our minds are open**

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, "Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." So he ordered that

they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

This is the word of the Lord.  
**Thanks be to God.**

### **Song: In the Lord I'll be ever thankful**

In the Lord I'll be ever thankful,  
In the Lord I'll rejoice.  
Look to God, do not be afraid,  
Lift up your voices, the Lord is near;  
Lift up your voices the Lord is near.

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### **Gospel acclamation**

Jesus Christ is risen from the dead.  
**Alleluia.**  
He has defeated the powers of death.  
**Alleluia.**  
Jesus turns our sorrow into dancing.  
**Alleluia.**  
He has the words of eternal life.  
**Alleluia.**

### **Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John 15. 9-17**

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have

made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: Love each other.

Jesus Christ is risen from the dead.

**Alleluia.**

He has defeated the powers of death.

**Alleluia.**

Jesus turns our sorrow into dancing.

**Alleluia.**

He has the words of eternal life.

**Alleluia.**

## Homily

I want us to think together about the story behind the first reading. We have heard how a group of people who are listening to the apostle Peter are suddenly filled with the Holy Spirit. Peter realises that if the Holy Spirit comes on these people, then he, Peter, must baptise them. So, who are these people? Why should Peter have hesitated to baptise them? And what does this mean for us?

It is a short period of time after the first pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The group of people following the risen Jesus is growing dynamically. Peter is at the centre of things, preaching, teaching, organising and healing. He has had trouble with the authorities in Jerusalem. The persecution of the followers of Jesus has begun. We take up the story with Peter in Joppa, a seaside town. We are not told why he is there. I suspect that Peter is worn out from all that has happened in the last few months and is having time out at the seaside to recover his strength and think about the future of the followers of Jesus, this reform movement within the Jewish religion.

The other main person in this story is Cornelius, a senior roman soldier stationed at Caesarea. He belongs to the large group of people in the roman world who were interested in the Jewish religion. This group

stood for a clear criticism of the family squabbles of the roman and greek gods, who represented the official religion of the roman empire, and replaced them in their interest in the Jewish religion with a defined ethical code of behaviour and a sharply defined understanding of there being only one God and no other. There was however a problem: how could people in this group worship the one God of the Jews without becoming jewish? Identity politics are not new. At that time it meant circumcision of men and denying the authority of the roman emperor – very difficult for a senior army officer.

Both Peter and Cornelius are at prayer and both have visions.

Cornelius is told in his vision to send to Joppa for Peter, which he does.

The vision of Peter is a bit more complicated. We are given interesting details about the circumstances: it is midday, Peter is hungry, and lunch is late. The first part of his vision is like a nightmare picking at his hunger. Peter, the fisherman, sees a net descending out of the sky full of animals, birds, snakes. He is told to kill and eat them. He answers: “no, according to the rules of our religion, these creatures are all unclean.” A voice from heaven tells him: “it is not for you to call profane what God counts clean.” Peter, the good Jew, cannot accept this. But then the vision comes again. Peter shakes it off again. But then it comes yet again a third time.

Peter is disturbed, uncertain what this means, when suddenly the servants of Cornelius arrive and ask him to go to Caesarea with them.

Peter, the follower of the crucified Jesus and leader of the followers of the risen Lord, has every reason to shy a meeting with a senior representative of the roman army. But he discovers that when they talk with each other a new and very different relationship begins. At last Peter understands his vision. He who had wanted to have nothing to do with the people who had crucified his lord, he who had regarded them as ritually unclean sinners, he who is concerned about the purity of the young reform movement which he leads, discovers that

he can talk with this enemy person to person. He can share with him his deepest beliefs and feelings. He can understand the vision as God teaching him to widen his understanding of others. He can say: "I now see that God has no favourites, but that in every nation the person who is godfearing... is acceptable to him." Peter proceeds to tell Cornelius about Jesus. " he was anointed by the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all..." Peter talks about the crucifixion and resurrection, of how the risen Lord fulfils all of what the prophets had spoken.

At this point today's reading takes up the story. Peter's sermon is suddenly interrupted by Cornelius and all his household being filled with the Holy Spirit. This is not what Peter had been intending. He hadn't even finished his sermon. But Peter doesn't complain. He has learnt to be flexible in the last few months and follow God's prompting, and so he has them all baptised.

We might think: Ende gut, alles gut.

But the story continues. Peter eventually returns to Jerusalem. The community attacks Peter sharply: "you have been visiting people who are not circumcised and eating with them." So Peter has to tell them everything which had happened, from the vision with the ritually unclean animals to the meeting with Cornelius and the gift of the Holy Spirit. When the community "heard this their doubts were silenced. They praised God and said: this means that God has granted life giving repentance to the gentiles too."

But even here, the story doesn't end. In the following chapters of Acts there continue to be arguments about the opening of the young Christian movement to people from elsewhere. Yes, foreigners can become followers of Christ, but is baptism enough, don't the men need to be circumcised – this was the theme of the first Council of the church at Antioch, which we can read about both in the Acts and also in Paul's letter to the Galatians. But all the arguments return again and again to Peter, his vision of unclean animals and the meeting with Cornelius.

So now I have answered my first two questions, who are these people and why does Peter hesitate to

baptise them. So let us look finally at what this story can mean for us today.

Traditionally the story has been used as the justification of the baptism of babies and children. Peter baptises Cornelius and all his household, which is argued to include everybody including family, servants even slaves. There is no discussion in the story about the right age for an understanding of faith in Jesus. There is no distinction between those worthy of baptism and those not, those on whom the Holy Spirit was poured out and those not. Peter has them all baptised. There have often been groups of Christians who have narrowed the access to baptism to true believers, whoever they may be. But this is a story about inclusion, about being a loving community which shares together its strengths and its weaknesses, even if this community is the gentile household of Cornelius, or as Jesus puts it in today's gospel: Love each other as I have loved you..... This is my command, love each other.

Secondly the story is about removing boundaries. Enemies become friends. It is a story about overcoming racism. Both Peter and Cornelius meet in each other somebody beyond the pale. We like boundaries, distinctions of language, colour, and culture. They give us comfort and clear structures. Boundaries are very supportive for a trusting and comfortable life. We are far more at home in racism than we would like to admit. Perhaps this is what makes ACF excitingly disturbing. The boundaries here are more fuzzy than elsewhere – this is good so.

Thirdly the story is about dialogue. You will have noticed in the telling of the story how often people tell each other about what has been happening. There were the interior dialogues in the visions. But there were also the discussions between people. The servants of Cornelius with Peter, Peter and Cornelius, Peter and the community in Jerusalem, not to mention Antioch. People talking and discussing, hearing from each other, listening to each other, learning to change their point of view, their understanding. Dialogue and discussion can be hard work, wearying and enervating. How often would we like a charismatic leader who simply says what is to be done, what is to be believed.

But even Jesus wasn't like that. He loved people, was prepared to lay down his life for others. He took people seriously. Peter takes Cornelius seriously, listens to him shares with him and is surprised at the end that he can love Cornelius and his whole household. And finally the story of Peter and Cornelius is about truth, not Peter's truth, not Cornelius' truth, not even my own truth, but God's truth, which draws Cornelius and Peter both into new spheres of understanding far beyond that which they had imagined. May God's truth draw us too out of our narrowness, our fear of the other, the strange and 'foreign' into a community of love, where everybody has his or her own place as of right whether a baby, a child, a youngster, an adult. Amen.

### **Song: When I Needed A Neighbour**

When I needed a neighbour  
Were you there were you there  
When I needed a neighbour were you there

*And the creed and the colour  
And the name won't matter  
Were you there*

I was hungry and thirsty  
Were you there were you there  
I was hungry and thirsty were you there

*And the creed and the colour  
And the name won't matter  
Were you there*

I was cold I was naked  
Were you there were you there  
I was cold I was naked were you there

*And the creed and the colour  
And the name won't matter  
Were you there*

When I needed a shelter  
Were you there were you there  
When I needed a shelter were you there

*And the creed and the colour  
And the name won't matter  
Were you there*

When I needed a healer  
Were you there were you there  
When I needed a healer were you there

*And the creed and the colour  
And the name won't matter  
Were you there*

Wherever you travel  
I'll be there I'll be there  
Wherever you travel I'll be there

*And the creed and the colour  
And the name won't matter  
Were you there*

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Sydney Bertram Carter  
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## **Intercessions (by Klaus)**

Lord in today's message you have given us the command to love each other. So we come before you to pray that we may open our hearts and minds to let your love become alive through our words and actions. Lord, send your holy spirit **so that we may become true ambassadors of your love in this world.**

Lord, in your conversation with your disciples you asked for our obedience when we follow your path. No blind obedience of a servant but of a friend who knows his friend. Lord, fill our life with your Spirit, forgive us

our lack of dedicated times with you, help us to find a new access to you, fill us with eagerness to hear your voice and let your voice be clearly heard, when we seek it. Let us not ask in vain but experience the truth that you will give us what we ask in your name. Lord, some of us may feel forgotten these days, not heard by you or others, to whom prayer may have become a stereotypic sequence of words with no receiver at the other end. Lord, we need you, we need you to become real, only then can we go out and be your ambassadors.

Lord, send your holy spirit **so that we may become true ambassadors of your love in this world.**

In difficult times two things can happen, we can close up and try to safe as much as possible for us or we help each other in solidarity. Lord, let us have the strength and faith to help even in difficult times. Many of us are yearning for the end of the current pandemic. We all had to suffer from lock down, isolation, the uncertainty of the future, the fear for the possible sickness. Lord let us not close the doors of our houses or hearts and concern only the survival and well-being of our closest family and friends, but see the many people around us hit by the pandemic in hard ways, may it be the isolation in depression, the existential fear how to survive due to lay off at work, the loss of relatives and friends, the own sickness and its longterm consequences. Lord, it was one of the striking, uplifting characteristics of the early church that despite persecution the believers reached out towards the miserable, the sick the outcasts. Lord, I confess that I have failed many opportunities, help me and whoever feels alike, that we get up and step out of our comfort zone despite the long time the pandemic has affected us and become your ambassadors. We pray especially for Margaret, Beth, Peter, Brian, and whoever is on our heart at this moment...

Lord, send your holy spirit **so that we may become true ambassadors of your love in this world.**

Lord, there are so many countries hit much worse than Germany by the pandemic. We pray especially for the situation in India, and the many countries we don't

even hear about. We pray for wisdom of the leaders of all countries, we pray for true solidarity of our rich countries but also of each one of us to give a hand to the people in need. Lord we pray for recovery of Lebanon, we pray for new attempts for peace in Ukraine, Myanmar, Syria, Afghanistan and all the other countries which disappeared from our screens. Lord thank you for Peter who understood your guidance and tore down walls inviting non-Jews into your community. Lord, let our prayer and help not reach to short but embrace the whole world.

Lord, send your holy spirit **so that we may become true ambassadors of your love in this world.**

Lord, we want to pray for our church, we are waiting eagerly for the new pastor and his family to arrive in Freiburg. Lord, it must be difficult for them to stay so long in the In-between of the old and the new calling. Lord, we pray that you use the time for us and them as a time of preparation, reflection and confirmation. Lord bless and protect them and let them arrive safely soon in Freiburg.

Lord, let us prepare our church as a great place of welcome for all who seek you because only so we will be true ambassadors.

Lord, send your holy spirit **so that we may become true ambassadors of your love in this world.**

Lord we pray this in your Son's name  
**Amen.**

### **The Lord's Prayer**

In the language of our hearts, let us pray as our Saviour taught us .....

