5 May -11 May 2024 Surprised by God

Acts 10: 44-48

**44**While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. **45**The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. **46**For they heard them speaking in tongues[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+10%3B+44-48&version=NIV#fen-NIV-27306b)] and praising God.

Then Peter said, **47**“Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.” **48**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.

Bible notes

 This is the climax of the story of Peter and Cornelius, aptly entitled by James Dunn in his The Acts of Apostles, ‘The Conversion of Peter and the Acceptance of Cornelius’. Peter’s surprising vision, urging him to eat all kinds of creatures, clean and unclean, is followed by an invitation from this Gentile God-fearer. When Peter finds out that he has been invited at the behest of an angel, he begins to ‘truly understand that God shows no partiality’, and he preaches ‘peace by Jesus Christ – he is Lord of all’ (10:34-36). As he speaks, Cornelius the Gentile centurion, together with his relatives and close friends, receives the Holy Spirit. Peter recognises the work of God in this outpouring ‘even on the Gentiles’. He realises, as he will later explain to the church in Jerusalem, that the Spirit is telling him ‘not to make a distinction between them and us’ (11:12), and they are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. When Peter tells the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem what has happened, he says, ‘who was I that I could hinder God?’ (11:17), and hearing this they fall silent. Then they praise God who ‘has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life’ (11: 18). God’s word gradually unfolds and is increasingly accepted, by Peter’s change of mind, in Cornelius’ commitment, and in the renewed praises of the church in Jerusalem. Peter remembers the word of Jesus, who had said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit’ (11:16, see Luke 3:16 and Acts 1:5).

Reflection

Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

*Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.*

Peter was speaking to the crowd, and presumably expecting great things from God. Yet he was surprised at the effect of his preaching. Why was Peter surprised? Did Peter’s preconceived ideas lead him to be in danger of limiting the power of God? What did Peter learn from this experience? How did his behaviour and relationships change due to his response to God's surprising revelation? How does our experience of God affect our relationships with others? What do we learn about welcoming and accepting others? Does our openness have limits? If so, how can we remove barriers?

 **Questions for reflection**

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*

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| A person in a red robe talking to another person  Description automatically generated |  |

**Questions**

* What aspects of the Christian faith might be surprising to others?
* How could you step outside your comfort zone, this week, to discover and experience your faith in new ways?
* How does your church show God’s love to people who are different from the majority?

## Prayer

*Adapt to your local context.*

**A prayer of thanksgiving**

We thank you, Lord, that if we are truly open to you,
you fill us with your spirit.
You surprise us with your joy and power.
We are ready to accept your challenge,
and to live our lives open to you,
with hearts full of praise and thanksgiving.
**Amen.**

**A prayer to end the Bible study**

Loving God, thank you for sending Jesus to show us your love.
Help us to make new friends and comfort those who are lonely.
Show us that, although we are all different, we are all loved
by you. Surprise us with your love in this coming week.
**Amen.**

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