

**6 May 2018 - Acts 10: 44- end, John 15: 9-17.**

*AIM: Transforming lives – We are not here by accident*

\*\*\*\*\*

“We are not here by accident.” This is one of a series of acclamations used in a family service I attended shortly before I was licensed as a lay minister. Six simple words. The response is, “Our Father has called us to worship.” A reminder of why we have come to that place at that time and for what reason. For me that day, it was also an affirmation that God did have a purpose and a plan for me. That a journey that had started simply as a desire to study, to use my brain once my children had started school, would take me, well, here!

You too may, with hindsight, be able to think of times when all things seemed to be working towards a particular outcome. Times when you found yourself in a certain place, with a certain person or having a certain conversation and it just seemed to be right. Moments when you felt that “this was meant to be,” God is in control.

The episode in our reading from the Acts today is one such occasion. Everything seems lined up towards this moment when the gentiles receive the Holy Spirit and are baptised. In the two chapters before this reading, we hear two parallel stories, culminating in the arrival of Peter at the home of Cornelius, a Roman centurion.

We know quite a bit about how Peter came to be there from the Gospels and early part of Acts. The fisherman first encountered Jesus in the course of a normal working day by the Sea of Galilee. He answered the call “follow me” and became the Rock upon which Jesus built the church. During the persecution of the early church, many people left Jerusalem. Peter set out on a trip to visit some of these scattered early Christians. His travels brought him to Joppa about 33 miles from Caesarea, where Cornelius lived. Here, he stayed with a tanner, a Jew, but also an outcast due constant dealing with dead animals. Peter had a vision, encouraging him to eat unclean food. While he was trying to work out what this meant, there was a knock at the door.

Meanwhile, God was at work in Caesarea. We know little about Cornelius, other than that he is “God-fearing”. He was not Jewish but believed in one God and followed some Jewish practices. He was visited by an angel, who told him that his faithfulness had been noted and instructed him to send for Peter, telling him where to find him in Joppa. It is of course Cornelius’s messengers who were knocking on Peter’s door while he was puzzling over his vision.

Peter, prompted by the Holy Spirit, obeyed the request to visit Cornelius, even though it was not usual for Jewish people to mix with non -Jewish people at that time. Peter travelled to Cornelius’s house and told the people who gathered there about Jesus. The significance of his vision and the events that followed are now clear to him. The gospel is for everyone.

His speech ends with the passage we have heard when the Holy Spirit was poured on both Jew and gentile, and those present were baptised. No one was there by accident. All were gathered by God to be part of this significant episode in the journey to bring light to the gentiles.

Throughout both stories, God used people in their ordinary lives to do his work.

You may be aware that this church has been part of a group from the Deanery, taking part in a series of workshops on the topic Faith on the Frontline. These address how we, as Christians, model our faith as we go

about our day to day lives. Our "Frontline" is the place where we interact with others who don't share our faith, our 21<sup>st</sup> century, equivalent of the gentiles in Caesarea.

The next workshop is on Wednesday and focusses on Faith in the Workplace, but this idea is by no means confined to work situations. A frontline could be our neighbours, the shops, the school gate, a club, our families.... The list goes on. Like Peter and others before us, we are commissioned to go and make disciples and we should do this in the places we find ourselves. After all, we are not here by accident. Take a moment to think about where your frontline might be.

Knowing that we have a purpose and a role to fulfil can be affirming, but it can also be quite daunting. It gives us a responsibility to put ourselves out there and to get involved. Last week Mark encouraged us to think about the ways through which we might be prompted to involve others in God's kingdom, by both inviting people into the church and engaging with them outside it.

Whatever we do, we should remember that we are not alone. Jesus's words to his disciples in John apply as much to us today as they did to Peter and the other disciples at the last supper.

As in last weeks reading, Jesus emphasises the need to abide in him. To rest or, as the message bible says make your home in his love. Through this love we can come close to Jesus and through Jesus close to God. We can acknowledge Jesus' love for us by showing the same love towards those we come into contact with. Through this love, Jesus says, "my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete" Through this love God sent the Holy Spirit to come alongside as he came to Cornelius and his household.

If we are rooted in Christ in this way, then whatever happens in our lives, we are sustained and guided by the love of Christ as he is sustained and guided by God the father.

Jesus concludes this section of his speech,

"You did not choose me, but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit."

In other words, "We are not here by accident." Our Father has called us to worship. We should respond, in our worship here today, but also in worship through our lives outside the church.

With this in mind, I thought it would be interesting to try and build up a picture of the sorts of places we as a congregation find ourselves during the week. I'd like to invite you, to mark on the map where you spend time on your frontline." You can use a dot to mark the place on the map, you can write on a post-it note the type of place you attend. Don't feel limited to one, we can have many frontlines. Think big and don't be confined by the limits of the map. Just write it down and we will find a way to display it. I'm hoping the other congregations will join in too. Next time you are in this place, take a moment to reflect. You are not there by accident; Your Father has called you to worship.

Kathy Kilgour May 2018