

Lectionary readings: Acts 11: 1-18; Psalm 148; Revelation 21: 1-6; John 13: 31-35

For reflection and prayer

- **Acts 11:** The early church was no different from us, for they wanted to exclude people - those who were not Jews, in their case. It took a supernatural intervention to convince Peter that God did not require people to jump through 'hoops' that we human beings devise before they are acceptable to God. And so love replaced the old prejudices, the old ways of looking at things. It's the love of God that causes barriers to be broken down. There are many who are uneasy about the inclusion of some today, but should we not err on the side of love, seeing every human being as created in the image and likeness of God, and therefore God's beloved? This week let's open ourselves to God's lavish, extravagant love which is wholly inclusive, and ask for grace to love like Him.
- **Psalm 148:** This is a Psalm of praise, showing the whole of creation praising God like a great symphony. How much praise is there in our lives? Are we blending with others who are full of praise? Are we adding to the peace and harmony in the world? Are we uniting our hearts in praise along with all those who are children of the Beloved, reaching out with the hand of friendship and love to all? When this happens, the churches will all be one without feeling the need to lay down man-made rules which exclude people.
- **Revelation 21:** What a glorious hope we have - a new heaven and a new earth, with God living in the midst of His people - no more tears or sorrow. Then our longings will all be fulfilled and our union with God

perfected. Why do we fear death when we are assured of God's presence and fullness of joy with Him and love such as we have never known before? But we can experience this here and now, for God is living in our midst, having made His home in our hearts. God says, *'Look! I am making everything new.'* (v5 The Message) This is present tense - God is doing this here and now. Let's allow God to transform us here and now so that we in turn co-operate with God to bring about a new earth through realising His presence and making His presence real in our lives.

- **John 13:** Judas has gone out into the night and the blackness of betrayal. Jesus knows that death is not far away and, in the eyes of most people at the time, this would be seen as failure. But here we find Jesus talking about being glorified. The 'success of failure', as someone described it to me many years ago. Perhaps you have experienced that in your life - failure turned around. You might like to look back and reflect on such an experience and on what God has brought out of it. Jesus urges His disciples to love one another, as He has loved them. This is what is going to convince the world of the truth of Christianity and the reality of God - when they see us showing self-giving, generous, extravagant, forgiving love without limit, the kind of love that God has shown us. When our churches are flowing with that kind of love, when there is no back-biting, no petty jealousies, no resentments, no criticism, no division, no unwillingness to forgive, no desire to exclude, only a love that goes on loving, that goes on forgiving, that goes on reaching out to build bridges and be reconciled. - this is the kind of love that glorifies God. Let's live this week to be Christ to people and to glorify God by our living.