

Lectionary readings: Acts 10: 44-48; Psalm 98; 1 John 5: 1-6; John 15: 9-17

For reflection and prayer

- **Acts 10:** Peter had preached on forgiveness and, even before he had finished speaking, there was an amazing outpouring of the Holy Spirit - an outpouring of God's forgiving love and a sense of freedom - which resulted in Cornelius and the Gentiles gathered in his house, praising God and speaking in tongues. God had clearly accepted these Gentiles, for the message of God's love and acceptance is for all. We might want to reflect on who we, as individuals or as a church, deem unworthy and want to exclude. The Gentiles responded spontaneously to God's love. How would we respond today if people in our services started praising God with freedom and abandon? Would we be shocked? Would we quickly usher them out of church saying, 'We don't do God in that way here!?' Or would we rejoice and join in the praise?
- **Psalm 98:** The thing that strikes me in this Psalm is the oneness that is being proclaimed: we are all one, connected and contained in this Holy Mystery we call God. Creation, too, sings its praise to God. May this Psalm awaken us to a new way of living that embraces the entire universe, seeing everything as inter-connected and therefore important. Living in freedom means recognising the connectedness of our existence, the whole of creation intricately woven into a seamless whole. The way we value and care for each part is the way we value and care for ourselves. As we enter into the freedom Christ came to bring us, we will become

more aware of how our lives touch all other lives, and we will live attentive to the connectedness of all that is. And we will join our praise of God to that of all creation.

- **1 John 5:** It's easy to say we love God, but the proof of whether we love God is how we respond to the people we live with and the people we meet in the course of our daily lives. Are we living in the way Jesus showed us? Are we reaching out with acceptance and love to those we come in contact with? If we find ourselves irritated by someone, are we open to accept that we are the one who needs to change? And are we willing to open ourselves to the grace of God to help bring about that change, no matter how costly?
- **John 15:** *'Make yourselves at home in my love,'* says Jesus (v9) That's a lovely picture. It reminds me of a Scottish expression 'to coorie in'. Jesus wants us to enjoy the same close, intimate relationship with Him that He had with the Father. This kind of relationship results in a deep-seated joy. Right relationships flourish when love flows. This passage speaks of freedom, for there is freedom in love. Christ calls us His friends. We want to spend time with our friends. Do we want to spend time with Jesus?

A prayer

'Creator God, you are life, fruitfulness, bursting, bubbling, gushing, spilling into the universe like a river rushing to the ocean, chattering, splashing, eager, excited.' (Donald Hilton)
Lord, let us catch something of Your dynamism, Your exhilaration, Your overflowing joy, Your exuberance. Stir us from our half-heartedness and reserve as we feel the immensity of Your love and allow that love to consume us so that we cannot but lift our hearts and hands and voices in praise of You and infect others with our joy. Amen.