

# St. Paul's Dorking Small Groups Jan 13<sup>th</sup> 2008

## Our Story – a story for everyone Acts 10:23b-48



### Word: Key points from Sunday's sermon

The story of God, the story of his Son Jesus Christ, the story of Christian faith, the story of his people - the Church, is a story for everyone. In the extraordinary context of the household of a Centurion of the Italian Regiment in the garrison city of Caesarea we discover Peter telling the story. It was extraordinary because the house of a Roman soldier is not somewhere that you would expect Peter, a Jew, to venture let alone speak of his faith in Christ. It is difficult for us to grasp the impassable gulf which existed in those days between Jews on the one hand and Gentiles on the other, not that the Old Testament advocated such a divide, rather it affirmed that God's purposes was to bless all the families of the earth through one family. One day the Lord's servant, the Messiah would be a light to all nations, the tragedy was that God's story for everyone had become twisted by racial pride and prejudice such that no orthodox Jew would ever enter the home of a Gentile – all familiarity with Gentiles was forbidden, and no Jew would ever sit down at the table of a Gentile. This then was the entrenched prejudice which had to be overcome before Gentiles could be admitted into the Christian community on equal terms with Jews and before the church could become a truly multi racial, multi – cultural family.

Now it is easy for us to look back at such exclusivity with incredulity! That the Jews could believe that God's story was just for them and behave in such highhanded ways! And yet the church can seem to act in just as an exclusive way – people made to feel guilty for only coming to church at Christmas, people being given a hard time because they want their children christened though they never go to church! etc.

The story of Peter and Cornelius invites us to engage in God's story in three ways:

**To see what God is doing** Rowan Williams spoke about the beginning of mission being about "finding out what God is doing and joining in." Before Peter ever met Cornelius God had been at work in Cornelius' life - Cornelius was devout, he feared God, he was generous, prayed regularly and gave to the needy (read 10:2). He had great faith in God to act after his vision and to invite the unknown Peter into his home and his close friends and relatives to hear what Peter would say (read v27).

**To hear what God is saying** Peter is on the roof praying – lunch is on the way and he's very peckish when he starts to dream – read 10:11-13. As a result of listening to what God was saying to him Peter did some remarkable things – read 10:23.25 -29.

**To speak out God's Story** Peter tells the story of Jesus – his life, death and resurrection – read 10:34-43 not in a dry formulaic way but in personal terms – read 10.39-42. Note the use of 'we' and 'us.' Peter spoke out so the hearts of Cornelius, his family, relatives, friends and servants were opened; they heard, they believed and they were filled with the Holy Spirit.



### Witness: Questions to discuss

- 1 In what ways do you think, the church, St Paul's, your small group can be seen as being exclusive? What can you do about this?
- 2 Rowan Williams spoke about the beginning of mission being about "finding out what God is doing and joining in." What do you think God is doing at the moment? How can you join in?
- 3 In what ways have you seen God working in the lives of those who have yet to come to know Jesus as their Lord and Saviour?
- 4 In the UK prayer is a vital part of life for nearly 20 million people and one in three adults believe that God is watching over them and yet only 7.6 million attend church at least once a month. What can we do?
5. How do you hear what God is saying? Share an occasion with others in your group.
- 6 How can the Holy Spirit help us 'tell the story of Jesus?'