

Ken Clark found a note from a former pastor to the congregation here somewhere around 1958 (60 years ago). I'll read out bits of it. The three issues – erratic attendance, prayer commitment and stewardship of resources. I was strangely comforted because I thought **we** were living through a time when those issues have set new records.

Thank you on behalf of the team representing us overseas if you've stepped out of your comfort zone and attended one or more of the prayer opportunities. It's been gratifying to see one of the things we'd prayed for last week happen – visas for a family and an individual seeking to serve overseas have been granted.

It's been a good discipline for me to be at church at 7:15 every morning Monday-Friday to make sure we pray in warmth. I think I've been alone only 3 times. This week leading up to our offering next Sunday we'll continue to focus on Transzend in our prayers and the following week the focus will be on our community, local mission and hopes for the future.

I find Julian's preaching thought-provoking and it often pushes me to think of things I may not consider. I felt last Sunday's message was profound in linking my favourite Biblical passage about Jesus to the great task ahead of us.

'He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.'

'For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him and through him to reconcile to himself all things....'

Eugene Peterson captures Paul's spirit as he paraphrases these two passages:

'He was there before any of it came into existence and holds it all together right up to this moment.'

'Not only that, but all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death....'

All I can say is Wow! You really had to be here although I recognise the 13 at were bed and chair pushing at the hospital did have a reason for not being here, some were not well enough to be here, some had other commitments and let's face it some are not sufficiently with the Jesus story lived in community to want to be here. Reading it on-line is better than nothing but a sermon is essentially truth spoken through personality and it requires both preacher and listeners to be present.

What was also encouraging was the number of people who approached Julian afterwards to say they'd be interested in being part of a Global Mission Team here. Whoops – now I remember, you're still thinking about that one aren't you? But you will speak to Julian if you feel this is a way in which you can respond to Jesus won't you? I remember a quote from a long time ago. The light that shines furthest is the one that shines brightest at home.

So thanks Julian!

As we make decisions on a daily basis about denying ourselves, as we consider whether to join others to pray this week; as we think of how we might contribute to the Self-Denial offering next Sunday – target of \$12 000 what can I say today?

The theme for this morning is 'A New Generation'; a New Spirit, then a New Perspective and now a New Generation; next week a New Generosity.

The Biblical passage set down for this week is long yet it's a unit and I'd like to us to hear the whole of Chapter 10 from Acts. I've invited others to read the story. And it's from the Message

Acts 10

Narrator: There was a man named Cornelius who lived in Caesarea, captain of the Italian Guard stationed there. He was a thoroughly good man. He had led everyone in his house to live worshipfully before God, was always helping people in need, and had the habit of prayer. One day about three o'clock in the afternoon he had a vision. An angel of God, as real as his next-door neighbour, came in and said,
Angel: 'Cornelius.'

Narrator: Cornelius stared hard, wondering if he was seeing things. Then he said,

Cornelius: 'What do you want, sir?'

Angel: 'Your prayers and neighbourly acts have brought you to God's attention. Here's what you are to do. Send men to Joppa to get Simon, the one everyone calls Peter. He is staying with Simon the Tanner, whose house is down by the sea.'

Narrator: As soon as the angel was gone, Cornelius called two servants and one particularly devout soldier from the guard. He went over with them in great detail everything that had just happened, and then sent them off to Joppa.

The next day as the three travellers were approaching the town, Peter went out on the balcony to pray. It was about noon. Peter got hungry and started thinking about lunch. While lunch was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw the skies open up - something that looked like a huge blanket lowered by ropes at its four corners settled on the ground. Every kind of animal and reptile and bird you could think of was on it. Then a voice came:

Angel: 'Go to it, Peter—kill and eat.'

Peter: 'Oh, no, Lord. I've never so much as tasted food that was not kosher.'

Narrator: The voice came a second time:

Angel: 'If God says it's okay, it's okay.'

Narrator: This happened three times, and then the blanket was pulled back up into the skies.

As Peter, puzzled, sat there trying to figure out what it all meant, the men sent by Cornelius showed up at Simon's front door. They called in, asking if there was a Simon, also called Peter, staying there. Peter, lost in thought, didn't hear them, so the Spirit whispered to him,

Spirit: 'Three men are knocking at the door looking for you. Get down there and go with them. Don't ask any questions. I sent them to get you.'

Narrator: Peter went down and said to the men,

Peter: 'I think I'm the man you're looking for. What's up?'

Romans: 'Captain Cornelius, a God-fearing man well-known for his fair play—ask any Jew in this part of the country—was commanded by a holy angel to get you and bring you to his house so he could hear what you had to say.'

Narrator: Peter invited them in and made them feel at home.

The next morning he got up and went with them. Some of his friends from Joppa went along. A day later they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had his relatives and close friends waiting with him. The minute Peter came through the door, Cornelius was up on his feet greeting him—and then down on his face worshiping him! Peter pulled him up and said,

Peter: 'None of that—I'm a man and only a man, no different from you.'

Narrator: Talking things over, they went on into the house, where Cornelius introduced Peter to everyone who had come. Peter addressed them,

Peter: 'You know, I'm sure that this is highly irregular. Jews just don't do this—visit and relax with people of another race. But God has just shown me that no race is better than any other. So the minute I was sent for, I came, no questions asked. But now I'd like to know why you sent for me.'

Cornelius: Four days ago at about this time, mid-afternoon, I was home praying. Suddenly there was a man right in front of me, flooding the room with light. He said,

Angel: 'Cornelius, your daily prayers and neighbourly acts have brought you to God's attention. I want you to send to Joppa to get Simon, the one they call Peter. He's staying with Simon the Tanner down by the sea.'

Cornelius: So I did it—I sent for you. And you’ve been good enough to come. And now we’re all here in God’s presence, ready to listen to whatever the Master put in your heart to tell us.’

Narrator: Peter fairly exploded with his good news:

Peter: ‘It’s God’s own truth, nothing could be plainer: God plays no favourites! It makes no difference who you are or where you’re from—if you want God and are ready to do as he says, the door is open. The Message he sent to the children of Israel—that through Jesus Christ everything is being put together again—well, he’s doing it everywhere, among everyone.

‘You know the story of what happened in Judea. It began in Galilee after John preached a total life-change. Then Jesus arrived from Nazareth, anointed by God with the Holy Spirit, ready for action. He went through the country helping people and healing everyone who was beaten down by the Devil. He was able to do all this because God was with him.

And we saw it, saw it all, everything he did in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem where they killed him, hung him from a cross. But in three days God had him up, alive, and out where he could be seen. Not everyone saw him—he wasn’t put on public display. Witnesses had been carefully handpicked by God beforehand—us! We were the ones, there to eat and drink with him after he came back from the dead. He commissioned us to announce this in public, to bear solemn witness that he is in fact the One whom God destined as Judge of the living and dead. But we’re not alone in this. Our witness that he is the means to forgiveness of sins is backed up by the witness of all the prophets.’

Narrator: No sooner were these words out of Peter’s mouth than the Holy Spirit came on the listeners. The believing Jews who had come with Peter couldn’t believe it, couldn’t believe that the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out on ‘outsider’ non-Jews, but there it was—they heard them speaking in tongues, heard them praising God.

Peter: Do I hear any objections to baptizing these friends with water? They’ve received the Holy Spirit exactly as we did.’

Narrator: Hearing no objections, he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay on for a few days.

A New Generation: I’ve raved about Schindler’s list before – after all I did watch it four times a year for 10 years. As he was leaving the Schindler Jews behind because he and his wife had to flee from the advancing Allied forces, Schindler spoke to Yitzhak Stern:

Schindler: I could have got more.

Yitzhak Stern: Oskar, there are eleven hundred people who are alive because of you. Look at them.

Schindler: If I'd made more money. I threw away so much money. You have no idea. If I had just;

Yitzhak Stern: There will be generations because of what you did.

And by the time the film was released in 1995, there were over 6000 living Schindler Jews and their descendants – a new generation; new generations.

A New Generation: As I listened to Luke’s gripping account of Cornelius and his friends I couldn’t help but think – a new generation, a new group reached with the good news of Jesus.

And then I began thinking of other ways in which new groups of people can be reached with the Good News about Jesus.

1. **A New Generation** – there are several possibilities – as a matter of interest, how many present today are the first or were the first person to trust in Jesus in your family. If you were or are you’re the beginning of a **new generation**; you’re like Cornelius. So whenever a person breaks out from the past in their family setting it’s like they’re the beginning of a new generation. And often that can be a hard place to be in.

2. The second situation where you can participate in a Cornelius-like situation is when you pass faith to the next generation. Now I realise in saying this I don't want to put a load on people; everyone has to come to Jesus themselves and as the saying goes, God has no grandchildren, people do have to decide for themselves. All you have to be sure of is that your kids can never turn and say to you, before me. I'm sure you've heard the comment; I can't hear what you say because of what or who you are.

Did you hear the words, '**A day later they entered Caesarea? Cornelius was expecting them and had his relatives and close friends waiting with him.**' Cornelius made sure that his family and friends were going to be part of what he was looking for.

3. A third situation where a new generation applies is when God uses you to introduce someone to Jesus. God used Peter in a roundabout way to introduce Cornelius to Jesus. In a version of this situation, someone said to James Wright in 1879, so the story goes, that the girls were better at the Baptist church (probably young women in those days) so he came to look; this must have been the case because he married Catherine Higginson in 1880. The Scott and Munro grandchildren are the 6th generation of Wrights to be part of this Christian community.
4. The fourth and fifth new generation applications are when we get out of our comfort zone, as Peter had to and connect with someone who is different to us **or** who comes from another ethnic or religious background.

So does this happen today. Well we're thinking of people who represent us in many places and nations across Asia. The Spirit is being poured out on people there too and those we support and who we've prayed for over these last two weeks participate in a 21st century application of Acts 10.

- The Spirit is poured out on a single mother who's been freed from the sex trade and given honest employment to provide for her family
- The Spirit is poured out on a young child who's given access to education so the cycle of disappointment and poverty will be broken.
- The Spirit is at work when a farmer is paid a fair price for his crop
- The Spirit is poured out on a university student far from his village or town who finds a Christian community to nourish his just beginning faith.

All over Asia there are people who are like Cornelius, who are being introduced to the Saviour who loves them – and we're part of this!

And as migration increases across our planet more and more of us are going to be able to participate in multi-cultural mission right here, right now.

The dramatic intervention of God in Cornelius' life gives us hope for those who don't yet know Jesus.