Chapter 10 of the Acts of the Apostles is one of the most pivotal and transformative in the whole of Acts, in the whole of the Bible, and, I would contend, in the whole of human history. If you haven’t read it recently you really must. God’s hand is clearly woven through the whole narrative. Cornelius, a Roman military officer, part not only of the Gentile world but of the occupying forces, an enemy of Israel and Judaism, is told in prayer to send for Peter. On the way to Cornelius, in prayer, Peter sees a large sheet being lowered from heaven containing every kind of animal and hears God saying that he has made everything clean. Peter learns from this that now there is no longer clean and unclean, no longer holy and not, no longer Jew and Gentile, no longer people inside the relationship with God and people not.

When Peter gets to the house he says, in front of a mixed audience, these amazing words which are filled with the Holy Spirit- verse 28: *“You yourself know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile- but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean. Now may I ask why you sent for me?”*

Peter explains the faith to Cornelius and the others, and then the reading we’ve just heard starts- the Holy Spirit comes on Cornelius and his Gentile companions. Those who have been circumcised are shocked at what God is doing- but Peter calls for the Gentile believers to be baptised because it is clearly God’s will.

It is a foundational experience for the future Church- a Church for all, a Church where all are welcome, a Church where God is doing new things and pushing back the boundaries and reaching out to new hearts and new communities and new possibilities. Peter embraces it all. He sees beyond political convenience and personal popularity and position. He is compelled to join in with this new thing the Holy Spirit is doing. As are we. As are we. As we are.

In John 15 Jesus is giving instructions to his disciples which they will only truly understand after the Resurrection, when they will be empowered with the Spirit to be apostles and witnesses and no longer disciples and followers, when they are sent out like shooting stars to do exactly what Peter does in Acts 10. *“Abide in my love. Keep my commandments. Love one another as I have loved you. You did not choose me but I chose you. Bear fruit.”* How should I live? *“Abide in my love. Keep my commandments. Love one another as I have loved you. You did not choose me but I chose you. Bear fruit.”*

What is the calling of the Church, of this Church, of every Church? *“Abide in my love. Keep my commandments. Love one another as I have loved you. You did not choose me but I chose you. Bear fruit.”*

The key concept behind both of these readings, and indeed our entire call as the Church, is Becoming. When we were young we were advised by wise adults not to fall in with a bad crowd because we would inevitably take on the morals and attitudes which surround us. We take on something of the world around. We become what we admire and who or what we spend time with. We will struggle to maintain our integrity working for a company which values profit over everything else- over people, over customers, over safety. And the opposite applies equally, of course. We become what we eat, what we take in, what fills our hours and lungs and heart, what surrounds us, the air we breathe and the water we swim in. Becoming. Become.

Which is also to say that we are not ever the finished product. We have never attained perfection, become the best and most generous me, become the complete and perfect Church community, become the just and inclusive political body we could be. We are a pilgrim Easter people and we are made to be on the road, following, listening, learning like Cornelius and Peter and the disciples who are sent out to be witnesses to the Resurrection of Jesus and the power and agency of the Holy Spirit.

This is assuredly true for this Church community as we deal with change in the context of a global pandemic and the way in which we have been obliged to press pause on so much of daily life. We are becoming something new. Patrick has moved on and Soba is here, and behind that simple change of personnel is a change of balance and relationships between the parish and the Circuit which we need to keep on navigating. Other members of Woosehill have moved away in this last year, or moved Church, or can do less at Church because of new personal circumstances. Others are coming on board. We are not the Church we were five years ago or even one year ago. There are things in this we regret or lament- things and people we still want to journey with- but if we are to become the Church God is calling us to become then we need to turn our faces forward to follow where God’s Holy Spirit is leading as well.

We are, as you know, part way into having three main conversations about how to come out of Lockdown well at Woosehill- how we regather the congregation, how we reconnect with the world immediately around us, how we make sure that our worship is everything it should be. These three groups have a deliberately short lifetime, and will aim to complete their work by the end of August, by which time they will have hopefully lined us up for the next, longer conversations, about what comes next and how we follow, how we become.

And what is true of us as a Church has to be true for each and every one of us as well. We are called to become more and more fully the individuals God longs for us to become. We are called to become more fully the disciples and apostles God longs for us to become, open to the things which the Holy Spirit is bringing to birth. Peter changes his mind about who God cares about and who Goes does not. Perhaps we need to change our mind about some things too- perhaps God is calling us now to think again, to listen again, to change. Perhaps God is calling us to care more, to dig in, to dig deep, to dare and risk and stand firm.

Perhaps God is saying that to the whole Church as well, Methodist, Anglican or somewhere in-between like us. Perhaps the sheet which is lowered from heaven for us contains in 2021 not unclean animals but people who have been treated as unclean for too long as we have, whether through deliberate action or through not caring enough, effectively denied that every single human being is made equally and wonderfully in the image of God, irrespective of gender or sexuality or disability or skin colour or age or competence or gifting, irrespective of whether they fit in with the way we think the Church should be or not.

We are not the finished product ever. We are called to *become*, as individuals and as a Church family and as the whole Church. We are called to be better- more godly, more effective, more open, more loving, more generous, more responsive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. With focus and determination and courage and hope we are called to follow, and to become. So let’s do it.

*God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean.*

Jesus says: *“Abide in my love. Keep my commandments. Love one another as I have loved you. You did not choose me but I chose you. Bear fruit.”*