

beautifully dressed for her husband.

"The Holy City" – pictured in a way that combines the images of Jerusalem, the Temple, and the Garden of Eden.

3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and He will dwell with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God.

"He will dwell with them" – showing the "Holy City" to be built of living stones, i.e. God's redeemed people, Hebrews 12:19-24,, 1 Peter 2:5. Since humanity's lapse into sin, separation from God has been humanity's greatest problem and tension, shown by responses to the prophets calling people back to God, God's own Son Jesus, and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

• **For further study**, this is a great read, telling the story of God's heart to have people know Him: Gen. 17:8; Exodus 29:45-46; Ps. 46:4-5; 95:7; Jer. 7:23; 31:33; Ezekiel 34:14; 37:27; Zech. 8:8; John 14:2-3; 17:24.

4 "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old

order of things has passed away."

"No more... crying" – because the source of sorrow, the curse and brokenness of sin under the old order, is overturned by God's presence.

5 He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then He said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

"Making everything new" – becoming a Christian by making a choice to recognise Jesus as Lord is a new spiritual birth as a new creation, 2 Cor. 5:17. But new life in Jesus is uncomfortably surrounded by the old and broken order. In the new heaven and earth the Lord makes everything new..

6 He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life.

"Alpha and Omega" – God was before the beginning and will be, beyond the end. Our perspective is limited by our limited concept of time. The perspective of heaven is unlimited, and views the present era in the whole time span from the beginning of creation, to the future and renewal of what was created.

IN PRACTICE We none of us like change at first, and renewal in church and Christian life can be an emotive subject! The fact is, God is always "doing a new thing", recalling people back to Him and renewing the way they relate to Him. The psalmists and prophets have done their best to put it into words, and Jesus carried out an amazing mission of showing what this actually looks like. The struggle between the old order and the old way, and the new life of the Spirit and new relationship will continue - until the end time, which will be marked by the renewal of everything. If insecurities in us fight renewal, it's time to repent and change, because without a doubt, that is where we are all heading.

QUESTION *What is it in us that resists change, and renewal, and having our understanding changed by God?*

PRAYER Thank you, God, that you never give up on us even when we show ourselves to be obstinate or unwilling to hear You afresh. Help us to be willing to work with you for Your kingdom, to learn to see the world with Your eyes, and to do our part to call people back to You and Your love. Amen.

The Living Word

The Bible readings for Sunday, May 19, 2019 with commentary notes

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Revised Common Lectionary readings for **May 19** (Easter 5) in Bible order

Prepare for Sunday by reading the Bible passages beforehand - read again to reflect on Sunday's teaching

Theme Three viewpoints show who Jesus is

John 13:31-35 – The heart of the Gospel is the new rule of love

Acts 11:1-18 – The ethos of the Gospel is the new acceptance

Revelation 21:1-6 – The outcome of the Gospel is renewal of everything

Read also: Psalm 148

John 13:31-35 – The heart of the Gospel is the new rule of love

Jesus' charge to the disciples is to continue to live by sacrificial love

31-32 When [Judas] was gone, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in Him. If God is glorified in Him, God will glorify the Son in Himself, and will glorify Him at once.

"Now... at once" – at this turning point on the Gospel, Judas heads out into the night, like a lever setting the machinery of Jesus' arrest and trial and execution in motion.

"When he was gone" – here is a more explanatory rendering in The Passion translation : After Judas left the room, Jesus said, "The time has come for the glory of God to surround the Son of Man, and God will be greatly glorified through what happens to Me. And very soon God will unveil the glory of the Son of Man." Jesus is seeing past the Cross, anticipating the glory between Him and the Father to follow.

"Glorified" – the Greek text repeats doxazo, the

word for glory or honour, five times, emphasising the exchange of glory between God and His Son, Jesus Christ, as a result of Jesus' giving up of His life.

33 "My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for Me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.

34-35 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another."

"New command" – new, but with a starting point in the existing commands of Moses to love the Lord and also one's neighbour as oneself, Deut. 6:5, Leviticus 19:18. What makes this different is Jesus' insistence that we love "as I have loved you", i.e. sacrificially.

• **For further study**, loving our enemies, and loving sacrificially, Matt. 5:43-48, John 15:13.

IN PRACTICE Although this incident came before Jesus' arrest, trial and execution, it was a recent memory and talking point among the disciples, following the Resurrection. More was to take place in the teaching of the final week, but here Jesus leaves His apprentices a clear instruction about how they were to carry on the work. The characteristic of this work is crystal clear – the

disciples were to be the heart of a new kind of open community. They couldn't come with Him, but they could maintain and grow what was so unique - Jesus' unselfish and unconditional love. 'Unconditional' included people who were different i.e. non-Jews. It included people who were demonstrably horrible. To love people who were unlovable in the ordinary way was a call to find a power to love from the promised Holy Spirit. This, too, was something they would grow into.

QUESTION *When we say God is glorified (or Jesus Christ is glorified), what are we saying in plain language?*

Acts 11:1-18 – The ethos of the Gospel is the new acceptance

The early believers are challenged to love and welcome those not like them

1 The apostles and the believers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God.

“Believers throughout Judea heard” — because Gentiles evidently becoming empowered Christians was a new phenomenon and for some, controversial. It was difficult for some of the Jewish believers to grasp that Jesus was equally Lord of believers not of their background.

“The Gentiles had received” — The author Luke is reflecting on how the household of the Roman centurion Cornelius heard Peter’s testimony of Jesus death and resurrection. The Holy Spirit fell on this Gentile gathering mightily and gave them a praise language, just as with the Jewish crowd gathered at Pentecost.

2-3 So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticised him and said, “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.”

“The circumcised believers” — criticism arose, not from the other apostles and brothers, but from those referred to elsewhere as the “circumcision group” who were seeking to apply the religious rules of Judaism to the new believers.

• **For further study**, see Galatians 2:1-5, 12, 21, Colossians 2:8-12, Titus 1:10

4 Starting from the beginning, Peter told them the whole story:

“The whole story” — Peter continues by explaining that he had eaten with the Gentiles

following God’s specific instruction, and then saw how God blessed and accepted them. He was submitting to God by welcoming Gentiles into the church, v.17

5-7 “I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles and birds. Then I heard a voice telling me, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’

8 “I replied, ‘Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’

9-10 “The voice spoke from heaven a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean. This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again.

11 “Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man’s house.

13-14 He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, ‘Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.’

Peter recounts the story already told by Luke in Acts 10:1-33.

15 “As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as He had come on us at the beginning.

“As He had come on us” — convincing evidence that they had received the Holy Spirit in the same sense as the apostles and those present at Pentecost, but without satisfying the Jewish law in any way. For Peter, that was God’s clear answer, and settled the debate.

16 Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptised with [or in] water, but you will be baptised with [or in] the Holy Spirit.’

17 So if God gave them the same gift He gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God’s way?”

IN PRACTICE We may not call ourselves theologians but we all have a theology - an understanding of how God is and how we relate to Him within the framework He has given us. For some that will be based on what the church tradition says that framework is, and our perception of the rules and practices that go with that. For others, it will be an understanding of what the Bible (surely a higher authority!) sets out, a progressive revealing of God's intentions from the times of the patriarchs to the discoveries of the young Christian church learning to be disciples of Jesus empowered by the Holy Spirit. We all pick up a mixture of rules, prejudices and learnings which we are comfortable with. And then, comes the upset! God presents a new experience which turns our presuppositions upside down. Peter, a careful, observant Jew, had his understanding of who God loved shattered - and renewed. God is always in the business of renewing us, and we should let Him.

QUESTION *How have you been challenged about how God sees those you might have thought outside the scope of His love?*

Revelation 21:1-6 – The outcome of the Gospel is renewal of everything

John sees a new community, with God, who is love, dwelling with His people

21 Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.

“Passed away” — the old was subject to decay,

“Stand in God’s way” — or withhold, kolyo, as in the earlier story of Cornelius’ conversion, Acts 10:47. Baptism is implied by Peter using word, as he did before. Baptism in the Bible always follows repentance and belief and is a way of demonstrating death to the old life, and a rising up into the new life that comes with allegiance to Christ.

18 When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, “So then, even to Gentiles, God has granted repentance that leads to life.”

“Repentance that leads to life” — choosing to turn from sin and from independence, to God, results in a new dimension of life, and eternal life. Like these Gentile believers, satisfying man-made laws and regulations is not how it works, and not necessary.

Rom. 8:20-21, 2 Peter 3:7 and 10, and suffered a melt-down at the approach of the judge on the great white throne, Rev. 20:13.

• **For further study**, contrast Genesis 1:1 with Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22.

2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride