**Westfield** **10.30 am** **9th May 2021**

**Call to worship** Psalm 98:4-5a

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music; make music to the Lord.

**Hymn No. M.P. 559 Praise Him, praise Him!**

Praise Him, praise Him!

Jesus, our blessed Redeemer!

Sing, O earth – His wonderful love proclaim!

Hail Him! hail Him!

highest archangels in glory;

strength and honour give to His holy name!

Like a shepherd, Jesus will guard His children,

in His arms He carries them all day long.

*Praise Him, praise Him!*

*tell of His excellent greatness;*

*Praise Him, praise Him!*

*ever in joyful song!*

Praise Him, praise Him!

Jesus, our blessed Redeemer!

for our sins He suffered, and bled, and died;

He – our rock, our hope of eternal salvation,

hail Him, hail Him! Jesus the crucified!

Sound His praises –

Jesus who bore our sorrows,

love unbounded,

wonderful, deep and strong.

*Praise Him, praise Him.....*

Praise Him, praise Him!

Jesus, our blessed Redeemer!

heavenly portals, loud with hosannas ring!

Jesus, Saviour, reigneth for ever and ever:

crown Him, crown Him!

Prophet, and Priest, and King!

Christ is coming, over the world victorious,

power and glory unto the Lord belong.

*Praise Him, praise Him.....*

Frances Van Alstyne (1820-1915) (Fanny J Crosby) CCLI 150801

**Prayer and Lord’s Prayer**

Lord God of all creation, who is like you? Your strength and faithfulness, Lord, are all around you. The heavens are yours, the earth is yours; you formed the world and all that is in it. Your throne is founded on righteousness and justice; love and faithfulness. Teach us always to live as in your presence. Help us to rest on the strong love of Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Keep us free from sinfulness and guide us in the way we should go. We the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

**The Lord’s Prayer**

**Notices, Mission Prayer, Dedication of Offering**

**Reading** John 15:9-17

**Sermon Chosen by God**

Jesus was in the Upper Room with his disciples and, having shared supper with them, showed his concern for them and how they would deal with his arrest, trial and crucifixion. He also knew they would face opposition and persecution and that passage is part of their preparation

as he tried to make sure they would not fall apart either as individuals or as a group because it could only be as a united group that they would survive and so we have this wonderful reminder of his love for them and how that would sustain them in the difficult times ahead.

They had seen with wonder the relationship he had with his Father and so we have the reassurance that Jesus’ love for them was as great as the Father’s for him but it was only through obedience to his teaching that they could continue to live in that relationship. That relationship then would find its true meaning in the way they then expressed that love for one another if they would love one another as he loved each one of them. This shared love, with God and with one another, would bring them great joy and the joy Jesus speaks of is the joy that is deeper than sorrow, the joy that would sustain them in their grieving when he was gone, the joy that would help them stay together until the future was made clear. Made clear because the next words he spoke must have sounded so strange, the greatest love a person can have is to lay down his life for his friends. What was he talking about? How clear to them that would become in the next 24 hours. This explanation as Jesus saw it changed the relationship he had with them for he now saw them as friends, as brothers who, because of their relationship with him, would eventually continue his ministry into the future.

Then we have the reminder of who is in control of all this. Jesus had called them and the gospel writers record the events of the calling of at least half of them but now was the time to help them see how it was their responsibility to go and let God bring out the fruits of the spirit in their lives. The fruits of love, joy, peace, compassion which work to build relationships and the fruits of healing and teaching and preaching that would draw people to God and work to build the church of Jesus Christ.

We can understand that in the beginning but what about us today? What has God chosen you to do? Are we chosen because we get on really well together? Are we chosen because we are different? Are we chosen for our different gifts and talents? Are we chosen because we get on despite our differences? It is all of these reasons and more because the answer is simply we have been chosen by God to bear fruit in our lives lived out for him. That is not to be feared but can only come through our obedience to his teaching that will enable us to continue to live in that relationship. That should bring us the peace of heart and mind that comes with knowing we are in his hands and he calls us to express that peace in our life together.

**Hymn No. M.P. 456 Make me a channel of your peace**

Make me a channel of Your peace.

Where there is hatred let me bring Your love;

where there is injury, Your pardon, Lord;

and where there's doubt, true faith in You.

*O Master, grant that I may never seek*

*so much to be consoled as to console;*

*to be understood as to understand;*

*to be loved, as to love with all my soul.*

Make me a channel of Your peace.

Where there's despair in life let me bring hope;

where there is darkness, only light;

and where there's sadness, ever joy.

*O Master, grant that I ......*

Make me a channel of Your peace;

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,

in giving to all men that we receive.

and in dying that we’re born to eternal life.

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**Reading** Acts 10:44-48

**Sermon Challenged by God**

When we look at the disciples Peter had always seemed destined to take on the role of being their leader and, despite the mistakes he had made, it was on him that Jesus had said he would build his church. So Peter had a great responsibility on his shoulders and was determined to stick to the principles that he believed in including the fact that Jesus as the Messiah had come to set the Israelites, God’s chosen people, free and that can be clearly in the part of his letter just before the one we read. Peter had been travelling round to visit groups of Jewish believers to encourage them and continue their teaching and nurturing when he was asked to go to Joppa to see a lady called Tabitha who had died and, through the power of the Holy Spirit, he was able to bring her back to life. The community invited him to stay with them and he did so for several days until God intervened.

Firstly God spoke to Cornelius, a Roman Captain who worshipped God along with his whole family and showed that by giving his support to the Jewish poor people. He was a man with a real sense of loving God and loving neighbour too yet there was still something missing from his life and, in order for him to find out what that was, God spoke to him and told him to send someone to Joppa to bring Peter to him.

Secondly God spoke to Peter. One day about lunch time Peter went up on to the roof to pray as part of his regular daily routine to find a place of peace and quiet but this was to be no ordinary time of prayer. There in the quiet Peter began to feel hungry and his prayers were interrupted by a vision of a sheet being lowered down to him which had in it all kinds of animals, reptiles and birds and then God spoke to him telling him to ease his hunger by killing and eating one of these. As a Jew Peter knew the rules and rejected the offer because the Law’s on food forbade him to do as God suggested. However, and it must have been both shocking and surprising to Peter, God’s response was not to give him a pat on the back and tell him how well he had done in resisting the temptation, but to tell him to not call unclean, or unfit to eat, what God had offered to him to eat. Peter was at a loss to understand what God was trying to say to him through this experience until, that is, the Gentile visitors arrived looking for him. Then, and only then, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, was Peter prepared to listen to what they had to say and then agree with their request to go with them to meet Captain Cornelius.

So we can see how God guided Peter into discovering that his mission was much wider than he had ever imagined. The vision was God’s way of preparing Peter to see God’s different plan for the spreading of the Gospel. It was Good News for all people and Peter could see now how in God’s eyes there was no longer any difference between Jew and Gentile and all were invited to become a part of the new people of God. So Peter did as he was asked and shared with Cornelius, his family and his guests the message about forgiveness and new life through the death and resurrection of Jesus and if Peter was shocked by having been led there by God he was even more shaken when, as we read in the second part of the passage, the Holy Spirit came upon the Gentiles and just as with the disciples at Pentecost they began to speak in different tongues. Then they were baptised and became part of the family of God alongside the Jewish believers.

It is a wonderful story of God revealing his plans step by step to enable Peter and the other disciples to begin to understand it little by little but it is also a story of how God challenged Peter’s misconceptions and made him look outside the narrow boundaries of his Jewish upbringing and understanding. It was time to think outside the box, to set tradition and habit aside and be open to the new ways God was wanting to do things. We are non-conformists, that means we don’t have traditions, unless we have done something at least twice and then it is carved in stone. But, joking apart, those in churches like ourselves, who are supposed to be open to God’s changes are often more fixed in their ways than some of the supposedly traditional churches. So as we worship this morning let us remember God’s love for us and how in loving him we are called to love one another and be united in using all our gifts to witness for him.

But let us not forget either, that his plan may not fit the usual patterns we are used to, and that he will challenge us to think outside the box, to step outside our comfort zone and show how much we really do trust him. As God’s people our fulfilment can only be found in carrying out the task he has set for us and following the path he has laid for us. In that way challenge and change are not to be feared but embraced knowing that we are living surrounded by the love of God today, tomorrow and forever.

**Prayers of Intercession**

God of all love you gave us your only Son, because you loved the world so much.

We pray for the peace of the world. Move among us by your Spirit, break down barriers of fear, suspicion and hatred. Heal the human family of its divisions and unite it in the bonds of justice and peace.

We pray for our country. Enrich our common life; strengthen the forces of truth and goodness; teach us to share prosperity, that those whose lives are impoverished may pass from need and despair to dignity and joy.

We pray for those who suffer. Surround them with your love, support them with your strength, console them with your comfort, and give them hope and courage beyond themselves.

We pray for families, for those we love,. Protect them at home; support them in theses times of difficulty and anxiety, that they may grow together in mutual love and understanding.

We pray for the church. Keep her true to the gospel and responsive to the gifts and needs of all. Make known your saving power in Jesus Christ , by the witness of her faith, her worship and her life.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

**Hymn No. M.P. 352 I’ve found a friend; O such a friend**

I’ve found a friend; O such a friend!

He loved me ere I knew Him;

He drew me with the cords of love,

and thus he bound me to Him:

and round my heart still closely twine

those ties which nought can sever,

for I am His, and He is mine,

for ever and for ever.

I’ve found a friend; O such a friend!

He bled, He died to save me;

and not alone the gift of life,

but His own self He gave me:

nought that I have mine own I call,

I hold it for the giver;

my heart, my strength, my life, my all,

are His, and his for ever.

I’ve found a friend; O such a friend!

all power to Him is given;

to guard me on my onward course,

and bring me safe to heaven.

Eternal glories gleam afar,

to nerve my faint endeavour;

so now to watch, to work, to war,

and then to rest for ever.

I’ve found a friend; O such a friend!

so kind, and true, and tender!

So wise a councillor and guide,

so mighty a defender!

From Him who loves me now so well

what power my soul shall sever?

Shall life or death? Shall earth or hell?

No! I am His for ever.

James Grindlay Small (1817-88) CCLI 150801

**Blessing**

Go in the peace of God that he may strengthen and sustain all you seek to do in his name. Amen.