

## A Reflection from Revd Stephen Willey for the 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

As Pentecost approaches we see in the readings (as also last week with the Philip's baptism of the Ethiopian Eunuch) the message that Christ's resurrection and forgiving love is beginning to be widely shared with the whole world.

In the Acts reading, the line:

"The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out *even* on the Gentiles"

Clearly this was not what the early circumcised believers expected... Even the uncircumcised Gentiles are included! The thought that the message of Christ, or that the Holy Spirit herself could be received by non-Jewish people (like last week's Eunuch) was beyond what people had imagined.

Of course what God can imagine (the whole of creation, for example) is both wonderful and beyond us, and God has given human beings imaginations too, which is a wonderful gift to be used by God's Holy Spirit for the times we live in.

Two things strike me most about these readings, firstly that God had imagined a more open Gospel than the original Christians had expected and secondly that God still inspires us, by the Holy Spirit, to imagine an ever fuller expression of that grace and love.

For this reason we can never limit God's love and God's grace. It may seem to us that there are people who are beyond the grace of God – like Peter's friends thought about the uncircumcised Greeks or the Jewish people thought about Ethiopian Eunuchs, but the truth of the Holy Spirit is that she blows open doors that we thought had been shut long ago and surprises us with God's love which knows no bounds.

This is relevant at the moment as the Methodist Conference is about to consider the "God in love unites us" report. This report talks about how the church treats people from the LGBTQ+ community.

This Sunday's reading and last Sunday's reading may prompt us to ask with Peter's people "What is the limit of God's love?" We may say that in terms of others – "Can it be that *even* they are included?" Or indeed, it might be that we can say this in terms of our own understanding of God's inclusive love, "Can it be that *even* I am included?"

This reminds me of Charles Wesley's hymn, "And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Saviour's blood?" John Wesley's emphasis on all people being given access to God's love is one of the things that defines the people called Methodists. Wesley believed that we are all called into a relationship with God through the love of Christ. We also see this theme in Methodist hymnody (eg Singing the Faith 358 "for all, for all my saviour died" or 409 "All are welcome in this place"). This love for all is at the heart of our readings this week.