

Heather Smith *reflects on*
Acts 11:1-18 and John 13:31-35

Building relationships with people who are very different from us isn't always easy. As humans we seem to be programmed to group ourselves into clans, suspicious of outsiders. The more dissimilar another group's values and behaviours from our own, the harder it becomes.

First-century Jews were different. They believed in only one God and had many strict laws, including diet. There was a reason for this: their distinctive identity was supposed to draw all the nations to the God of Israel. The standards were set high, so others would see them as a shining example and come to know the one, true God.

For Christians, today's reading from Acts shows how it actually came to pass. There is a great deal more to it than a story about eating pork. Peter's vision showed that the good news about Jesus was not just for the Jews. Thankfully, Peter got it. Then, when some non-Jews arrived at the house where he was staying, he understood that they could be welcomed into the new faith.

But being open to everyone was not the end of clans. Anyone can join the Christian clan, but Christians are still expected to have their own values, different from those of others. Jesus explained in John 13: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another... By this everyone will know that you are my disciples". If we demonstrate that love, people will be drawn to God. 😊



People of the New Testament

The woman at the well (John 4:1-42)

by Caroline Fletcher

We're not even told her name. She is the woman Jesus met at a well in a place known as Sychar. He asked her for a drink and had a deep conversation with her. By studying what they discussed, we can discover a lot about the group of people to which she belonged, known as the Samaritans. These people appear a number of times in the New Testament including, of course, in the story of the Good Samaritan.

Today, Samaritans co-exist peacefully with their Jewish and Palestinian neighbours. Jesus' exchange with their ancient ancestor broke down barriers and challenged xenophobia. Inspired by such actions and moved by his Spirit, Jesus' followers went on to reunite Jew and Samaritan within God's family of the Church. Because of such events, St Paul could declare to Christians of many different ethnic backgrounds: "all of you are one in Christ" (Galatians 3:28). 😊

Lord, teach me your values, and a willingness to share them joyfully with others, so I may welcome all into the faith. Amen.

LGBTQ+ Church

Part 2 – the challenge

by Jayne Ozanne

How do you create change in large religious institutions? This was the conundrum faced by myself and my friend who had introduced me to Pope Francis in November 2019 – the Argentinian ambassador to Italy and the Holy See, His Excellency Robert Manuel Carles.

The answer came from Pope Francis himself. He challenged the two of us to get as many senior religious leaders from around the world together to make a statement affirming

LGBTQ+ people which he could consider endorsing.

We therefore set about creating the Global Interfaith Commission on LGBTQ+ Lives that would bring together senior religious leaders from around the world who were prepared to speak out on behalf of LGBTQ+ people, specifically calling for an end of violence and criminalisation towards them. This project was supported by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and the first to sign up was the late Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu. 😊

“If you wish to possess finally all that is yours, give yourself entirely to God.”

Hadewijch of Brabant, thirteenth-century Belgian mystic