

Many of you will know that before entering into the Anglican ministry, I was a Prison Chaplain. In my first week on the job, I was introduced to someone, who said, very plainly to me, "I wouldn't normally sit down with a man wearing a tie."

My reply was equally plain, "I wouldn't normally sit down with a crim and a tattooed face!"

We were both Christians. And in that moment, we were both pushed to leave the security of what we found comfortable. We were both asked to go beyond what we found safe and welcoming. Both stretched to the margins of what we felt was acceptable and unacceptable. Both pushed, to share "table fellowship" with those we felt were a little suspect.

The book of Acts has something to say about this.

In chapter 10, Cornelius; Roman soldier, agent of the oppressor, gentile, yet a God fearer; has a vision from an Angel, he is told to send people to Peter. In the meantime, Peter also has a vision...and the long and short of Peters vision is that he is pushed to leave the security of what he found comfortable, what he found safe and welcoming, of what he thought was acceptable to God. Peter is pushed to the margin of his thinking, and asked to have table fellowship with those he found a little suspect.

He was to welcome these gentile visitors and make Jesus known to them.

He was pushed in to sitting down with a bloke wearing a tie, a crim with a tattooed face.

In our reading, while Peter was speaking to these people, "the Spirit fell on them."

We all have places, people and situations which make us feel insecure and uncomfortable. Unsafe and unwelcome. We all have behaviours, actions, and manners, that we feel are acceptable and unacceptable. We all have people we wouldn't normally have table fellowship with. People we feel a little suspect about.

Like Peter, we all have margins. It doesn't matter if we are the richest or poorest person in the building, we have margins. It doesn't matter whether we are the most or least educated person in the building, we have margins, it doesn't matter whether we are the most holy or least spiritual person in the building we have margins, and they are not the same.

Margins are not just the categories of people, that make us uncomfortable, they are also our personal challenges. For Peter it was Gentile God fearers, for another, it is a bloke with a tie, for another, a crim with a tattooed face.

God carries Peter to the edge of his margins, and then challenges him to let them go. God carries us to the edge of our margins and challenges us to let them go, as well. God does this, because God doesn't have margins.

This is what is so surprising and unusual about God that at the very edge of our margins, at the very places we make judgements about what is acceptable and unacceptable, what is holy and unholy, what is right and what is wrong...this is where the Spirit falls....

Because the God who acts in Jesus Christ, over turns all margins. The religious margins of fundamentalists, liberals, charismatics, Pentecostals, Catholics, Protestants and orthodox. The racial margins of blacks and whites, browns, yellows and reds. The political margins of democrats and republicans, labour supporters, National voters, Green party members, communists, socialists and capitalists. The ethic margins of us all. God overturns our margins.

We are asked to have table fellowship with those we find a little suspect.

God overturns the margins of the rich and the poor, the important and the humble, the old and the young, the short and the tall, the beautiful and the plain, the fat and the skinny. The sick and the healthy. The intellectual powerhouse and the gentle lightbulb.

We are asked to have table fellowship with those we find a little suspect.

The food margins of farmers, meat eaters, vegetarians and vegans. The sexual margins of gay and straight, gender margins of men, women and transgender people. The social margins of the powerful and the powerless.

We are asked to have table fellowship with those we find a little suspect.

We are called to this, by the God who.... in Jesus Christ.... Has overturned the margins between God and us...and made us welcome at table fellowship with God, and one another.

“For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments.” Let’s let our margins go.

“As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love.” Let’s let our margins go.

Let’s let our margins go.....

in the sure and certain hope.... that if we do....

... the Holy Spirit will fall.....

Thanks be to God.

Amen.