

Sermon Summary | Sunday 14th June 2026 | Acts 11.1–18

In Acts 11.1–18, the church is learning to hold together two truths that are often pulled apart: God welcomes outsiders, and God calls sinners to repent. If we speak only of welcome, we may forget repentance. If we speak only of repentance, we may make it sound as though only cleaned-up people are welcome. Acts 11 gives us something better than either cold religion or vague affirmation. It shows us the grace of God in Christ, who brings sinners home and gives them life. The key sentence comes at the end of the passage: *“Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.”* God welcomes outsiders by granting repentance that leads to life.

First, we must not narrow God’s welcome. The believers in Judea hear that the Gentiles have received the word of God. That should be wonderful news. But when Peter returns to Jerusalem, he is criticised because he has eaten with uncircumcised men. Their concern is not first whether the Gentiles heard about Christ or believed in him, but whether Peter shared table fellowship with them. They were in danger of making God’s welcome narrower than God himself had made it. Churches can still do this when “everyone is welcome” quietly means “everyone like us is welcome.” Acts 11 tells us not to put barriers in front of people that Christ has not put there.

Second, we must not reduce God’s work. Peter explains that this was not his idea. God gave him the vision, the Spirit told him to go, and Cornelius had been told to send for Peter so that he might hear *“a message by which you will be saved.”* God’s welcome is not merely social inclusion. Cornelius did not need Peter simply because he needed friends; he needed to hear the saving message of Jesus Christ. Christian welcome is not just, “Come in and we will be nice to you,” though we must be warm and kind. It is, “Come in and hear of Christ, who saves sinners.” The church must be both hospitable and clear, warm and truthful, patient and evangelistic.

Third, we must not resist God’s gift of repentance. As Peter begins to speak, the Holy Spirit falls on the Gentiles just as he had on the first believers at Pentecost. They receive the same Spirit, the same gift, and the same Lord. Peter’s conclusion is humble and simple: if God gave them the same gift, who was he to stand in God’s way? The church falls silent, then glorifies God because he has granted repentance that leads to life. Repentance is not the enemy of grace. It is God’s gift. It means turning from sin, self-rule, and false trust to the living God.

This searches us deeply. It challenges our apathy about mission, our reluctance to welcome those who are not like us, and our temptation to make repentance a message for other people rather than mercy for ourselves. It also speaks into questions of sexuality, identity, holiness, and obedience. Christ’s welcome is real, his compassion is real, and his call is also real. No one should be treated as a problem before they are treated as a person. But welcome does not mean Christ blesses us unchanged. He receives sinners with mercy, forgives, cleanses, gives his Spirit, and teaches the way of life.

Acts 11 begins with believers criticising grace and ends with them glorifying God. That must be our movement too. God’s welcome is wider than Peter expected, reaching outsiders and people far off. And God’s welcome is deeper than our culture imagines: it saves, turns, and brings sinners from death to life. So when God brings outsiders in, let us not stand in the way. When God calls sinners to repent, let us not apologise for his mercy. And when God grants repentance that leads to life, let us glorify him.

Questions for personal reflection

1. Where might I be narrowing God’s welcome by expecting people to become socially familiar, respectable, or “like us” before I truly receive them?
2. Where do I need to receive repentance not as a weapon for someone else, but as God’s mercy for me — turning me from sin, self-rule, and coldness into life with Christ?