

2019-05-19 ... 10am Service ... Revd Canon Judy Hunt
Acts 11: 1 – 18; John 13: 31 – 35
'Keep Out (or not!)

Introduction ...

'Keep Out'

Have you ever put up a **'Keep Out'** sign?

It's relatively common for teenagers to put one on their bedroom door ...

Keep Out - sometimes aimed at parents, sometimes at younger siblings!

Or maybe you've done it for health and safety reasons – as a church not so long ago – we needed to keep people off the North steps ... **'Keep Out'!**

C1 Christians ...

The early Christians –most of whom were Jews – were used to living with **'Keep Out'** signs or assumptions.

In every day life – every village had a **Keep Out** mentality towards those suffering from Leprosy.

In the Synagogue locally or the Temple nationally – only Jews allowed in certain areas:

Keep out to Gentiles ...

Only Jewish men allowed in other areas:

Keep Out to Women ...

Acts ...

Our passage from Acts shows how God challenged Peter ... and through Peter the whole church – how God challenged them to take down and to reverse one of these **Keep Out mentalities**. To accept Gentiles, non-Jews - as equally Christian ...

No Keep Out sign ...

No – you have to be like us before you can join us in terms of adopting Jewish practices ...

For us ...

How might this relate to us?

To us in our every day lives?

To us as a church?

Are there those who we try and keep out? - subtly or explicitly?

The overarching Mission Statement of this Church is that **All are Welcome ...**

And although, no doubt, we can always improve – I think we do try to embody that, to live that ... whatever ethnic origin, language, social background.

PTO

But maybe we need to examine more our attitude to behaviour ...

Are there certain behaviours that we want to **keep out** of our church or home ... and might we be right to do so?

What about violent people
drug dealers
vandals or arsonists
sex offenders

Is it possible to build bridges to such people ... or do we resort to putting walls up?

Can we acknowledge that each is made in God's image whilst not condoning their behaviour – and indeed protecting others and ourselves against their behaviour?

This is not at all easy, is it? You may be familiar with the phrase: **hate the sin, but love the sinner**. It's a phrase that's easy to remember, easy to say – but hard to live.

Jesus ...

And I certainly need ... and I think we all need – the grace of Jesus to help us. His example can inspire us ... and in our Gospel we read his command to **love in the same way that he loved**. But inspiration is rarely enough ... we need to be empowered too – and that is the role of the Holy Spirit.

We're going to hear now a slightly 'tongue in cheek' update of the reading from Acts. It applies the teaching of Acts to the differences between 2 churches ...

With a strong Churches Together in Whitchurch we may feel we've moved beyond this ... but there are probably still things to learn ... and we can apply it more widely ...

Red Church: Blue Church

Minister: *(clutching a blue book)*

*Brothers and sisters, we in the Blue Church have the authentic truth. An eternal blueprint. And we are proud of our traditions. A thin blue line standing up for our colour, with variation between different shades of blue, and **(smiles)** we love the blues.*

*But the other day I had a call **(slight pause)** out of the blue. A call from the red. The Red Church, our most bitter rivals, invited me to a meeting. Indeed. The reds. Better dead than red, we say. They were having a red-letter day for which they were rolling out the red carpet. They wanted to break centuries of tradition by inviting me as their special guest.*

It took some time to decide whether to accept. Many of you were opposed. But I wasn't going to get into a blue funk about it. I decided I would go and hold my head up high for the Blues. Once in a blue moon these things are acceptable. Then we can say we have shown tolerance to lesser churches.

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There were some tricky blue waters to navigate. I decided that to prove we weren't prudes, I would condescend to wear a red tie. At the meal I ate red-blooded meat and drank red wine. I expected a bolt from the blue if I was sinning seriously; but there was no divine intervention.

*Once I'd negotiated these preliminary obstacles, I found myself beginning to relax. I'm pleased to report, contrary to rumour, that they do not smoke, drink or smell any more than we do. They confessed their favourite programme was Blue Peter and I said my favourite story was Little Red Riding Hood. We both admitted our problems: we have blue movies, they have red light districts. Some of their beliefs light our blue touch-paper, some things we do are like a red rag to them. We laughed at these sacred objects of belief. I felt the ice beginning to melt. **(wipes sweat with red handkerchief)***

After several hours of this, we realised we shared many of the same beliefs about God. I felt the Holy Spirit at work. In a few hours I found myself questioning my prejudices. Could the Red Church be red-eemed, like us? Maybe the Holy Spirit was asking us to inspect some of the Blue traditions more closely? Starting with our obsession with colour. Should we fear that unless we scream blue murder, the reds will take over? That is all a red herring. Be inclusive, no one out, abandon cultural barriers. Otherwise it may be our faces that turn blue on the Day of Judgment.

Brothers and sisters, I feel God's initiative on this issue. And so I have a solemn announcement to make. Will you let members of the Red church, and any other church, join us? Will you join me in working for a church of all colours? In memory of God's blessing after the flood, let's call it – The Rainbow Church!

(<https://www.rootsontheweb.com/lectionary/2019/101-may-june-2019-c/easter-5/explore-respond>)