Sermon:

The first members of the early church were all Jews. Their big question was “How much of their Jewishness was to be retained, and how much transformed?”

In our culture we tend to avoid conflict: it is often seen as devisive & destructive. In Acts 11.1-18 the Church is in disagreement, but what matters is how it was handled.

[1] An objection was voiced   
**“You were the guest in the home of uncircumcised Gentiles, and you even ate with them”** (11.3)

This violated the holiness laws. It was not so much that they were Gentiles, uncircumcised and that he ate with them, but that by doing so their unholiness polluted Peter in God’s eyes. The objection is found later in Acts, but also in Galatians 2.11-14.

How often in church have objections be thought about but not expressed, and so fester? After too long the pain explodes to devastating effect.

This is not an excuse to loudly complain about everything and anything…

[2] An explanation was given

**“So Peter gave them an account of what happened from the very beginning”** (11.4)

Peter could have responded similarly – ***“Gentiles are human; circumcision isn’t all; I was only being hospitable”*** – but rather than raise the temperature, he explained by telling his story.

Too often in life we are so concerned with our opinion (which may be good & worthy) that we are not prepared to listen to the other person. In Church we must be open to allow folk to voice objections but equally also to listen to explanations.

[3] The Spirit was discerned.

**“Then God has given to the Gentiles also the opportunity to repent and live!”** (11.18)

What is remarkable is that the Jerusalem Christians changed their minds. Completely, absolutely. Why? Through the story they discerned God at work.

It meant that God was telling them holiness laws no longer applied!

It is hard for us to achieve that same discernment, and even harder not to reject others’ ideas because they are ‘wrong’, and so build walls within the fellowship.