

Reflections for May 9, 2021 -- The Story of Acts 10

What if someone you didn't know heard you were a follower of Jesus Christ and wanted to know more about your faith? What if that person sent for you to come and make a presentation about your faith? . . . Would you go? . . . If you went, what would you say?

Peter had to make this decision in Acts, due to the startling vision of a Roman Centurion four days earlier—in which an angel of God told him to send for a Jewish man named Simon Peter.

This centurion, named Cornelius, was a *proselyte*, a gentile who worshiped the God of the Jews but was unable to share table fellowship with them because he was considered *ritually unclean*—he was uncircumcised.

But even more astonishing than Cornelius' vision was the vision that came to Peter himself, at exactly the same time. About noon Peter went up to pray on the roof, but *hunger* interrupted his prayers, and he fell into a trance while the midday meal was being prepared below.

In his dream-like state **he saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet was let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."**

"Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." This happened three times, and then the sheet was taken back to heaven."

Early in the Hebrew scriptures—what we call the Old Testament—in Leviticus 11, God goes into great detail about *clean* and *unclean* foods to guide the chosen people in their eating. You may know that modern-day Jews don't eat pork, but the dietary laws extend *way* beyond that.

Peter had been an observant, faithful Jew all his life. He was *horrified* to think God would not only *allow* him, but even *command* him to eat "unclean foods."

So in today's verses we have an astonished Peter, summoned by a Roman army commander. Peter is astonished at the summons, and even more astonished to hear that this gentile commander of the occupying army also had a vision, one that included Peter himself.

Peter had learned an important lesson from his vision of God and the foods he had believed to be *unclean*. Because of his dream encounter with his Lord, he was able to accept the invitation of a *man* who would likewise have been considered unclean. --

Do not call impure anything that God has made clean. This was God's command to Peter—Peter, the Rock on whom Jesus built his church. And by the end of today's reading we find that God has *cleansed* the alien gentiles, **Cornelius and his relatives and close friends.**

Peter and the Jewish Christians who had come with him were *astonished* when the Holy Spirit came on all who heard Peter's message. They began speaking in tongues and praising God.

We're not sure exactly what *speaking in tongues* was all about. For some of the 41,000 Christian denominations today, that's a very important part of worship. Most Lutherans I know have never encountered it. It sounds foreign and strange to us—but based on these verses from Acts, we'd better not criticize it!

When Peter heard these foreigners praising God, he said, **Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.**

One of my favorite texts for preaching is **Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with the judgment ye make ye will be judged (Mt 7.2).** Here's a newer translation: **Don't judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged.**

Put those verses together with today's text from John, and you have the entire *gospel*, the whole of the *good news of God in Jesus Christ*. (This is the other sermon I wanted to preach today!)