



Easter 2, April 18-19/15

Acts 10:1-48 Peter's Vision

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Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we believe and in believing we obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today's bible story takes us from the hallowed pages of the Gospels, the stories of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, out into the *wild and wooly* early days of the church. Our story last week carried us to the mountain in Galilee where the risen Jesus had gathered the disciples and all his followers, then charged them with these words:

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe everything that I have commanded you.

Now by starting out in chapter 10 of the Book of Acts, we've taken one giant step that has skipped over a lot of territory. So I thought I'd begin by giving you a recap of what has happened in the meantime. Feel free to grab one of those pew bibles and follow along. The first chapter of Acts begins on page 993.

Chapter 1. Having given his directions to the disciples and leaders of the Church, Jesus gets ready to ascend into heaven.

And to show you just how true the saying is ***the more things change, the more they stay the same***, just before Jesus leaves them, the disciples ask him, *Lord, is **this** the time that you will restore the kingdom to Israel?*

They were all certain that Jesus' return with the Kingdom of Heaven would **surely** happen in **their** lifetime – *as has every generation since...* He tells them not to worry about *when* God will do *what*, but to focus on what God wants them to do now: ***be witnesses of Christ to all the world.***

In Acts, Chapter 2 (p. 994), we read about the **Day of Pentecost** when the Holy Spirit comes upon the disciples and they start preaching the good news of Jesus Christ in languages from all over the world! Some in the crowd accuse them of being drunk, but Peter comes to their defense, begins to preach to these Jews in Jerusalem and the Spirit's harvest begins.

All the way through chapter 7, the disciples preach and heal people in Jerusalem. It's not until chapter 8 that they branch out from the city – and they only do **that** because they're being persecuted by the political and religious leaders for stirring up trouble. So they head to **Samaria**, to folks who really are kind of back-woods cousins of the Jews.

At the end of chapter 8, Philip baptizes an Ethiopian Enoch who, though not an Israelite, was in town to worship at the Temple, so we're assuming he was Jewish.

So really, it's not until chapter 10, our story for today, that the disciples manage to make contact with a true foreigner by the name of Cornelius who **really does** come from outside the box...and they only go to **him** because the Holy Spirit **forces** them to!

This man that Peter visits is a close friend of the Jews – spiritually and socially. Yet, at the **same** time, he's **also** a **bloody Roman** – an **officer** in the army that is occupying their country!!

So let's hear how this story unfolds...

Scene 1 (chapter 10 vs. 1-8)

¹ In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort, as it was called. ² He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God. ³ One afternoon at about three o'clock he had a vision in which he clearly saw an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius." ⁴ He stared at him in terror and said, "What is it, Lord?" He answered, "Your prayers and your alms

have ascended as a memorial before God. ⁵ Now send men to Joppa for a certain Simon who is called Peter; ⁶ he is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside.” ⁷ When the angel who spoke to him had left, he called two of his slaves and a devout soldier from the ranks of those who served him, ⁸ and after telling them everything, he sent them to Joppa.

- Cornelius is described as a righteous man who “feared God” (see v. 22). [Rolf Jacobson, “I Love to Tell the Story” podcast] **God-fearing** = specific term for any non-Jewish person who actively worships God, but has not undergone circumcision... Such people
-are *in*, not of;
-*almost*, but not quite;
-*friend*, but truly not family...
- Cornelius’ *spiritual* health is documented, yet his encounter with the angel is strange. He’s ordered to send for Peter but not told why... **What would you want to ask the angel if you were Cornelius?**

Let’s continue with our story...

Scene 2 (vs. 9-23)

⁹ About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. ¹⁰ He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance. ¹¹ He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. ¹² In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. ¹³ Then he heard a voice saying, “Get up, Peter; kill and eat.” ¹⁴ But Peter said, “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean.” ¹⁵ The voice said to him again, a second time, “What God has made clean, you must not call profane.” ¹⁶ This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven...

¹⁷ Now while Peter was greatly puzzled about what to make of the vision that he had seen, suddenly the men sent by Cornelius appeared. They were asking for Simon’s house and were standing by the gate. ¹⁸ They called out to ask whether Simon, who was called Peter, was staying there. ¹⁹ While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Look, three men are searching for

you. ²⁰ Now get up, go down, and go with them without hesitation; for I have sent them.” ²¹ So Peter went down to the men and said, “I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for your coming?” ²² They answered, “Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say.” ²³ So Peter invited them in and gave them lodging. The next day he got up and went with them, and some of the believers from Joppa accompanied him.

-So Peter is dreaming about a *sheet of meat* – he hears the command to *Kill and eat*, and though he believes it’s the Lord who’s talking...he refuses to obey!

-What do you make of his *indignant* response?

-What lesson did Jesus often drive home about the folks who follow the law too closely?

The Voice then says, *What God has made clean, you must not call profane*. **Clean** and **profane** described the difference between a good, circumcised observant Jew (clean) and...the **rest of the world** (profane).

The righteous Jews were required to separate themselves from the rest of the world due to their devotion to God’s Word – and the way they believed that people are to live in the world by following God’s Law.

-Ironically, though Peter is righteously following the commands of his **religion**, he has conveniently **forgotten** what his Lord and Master said about how the law prevents people from coming to God simply because they don’t eat the right food in the right way...!!!

In Matt., ch. 15 Jesus says:

It’s not what goes into a person’s mouth that makes them unclean, but what comes out of it: evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, and slander (vs. 10-20).

-Q: What good are we to the rest of the world if we think of ourselves as better than the rest of the world?

So Peter is kicked off the roof by the Spirit, meets the travelers, gathers some faith-buddies, and off they go to the house of the Gentile officer.

Let's see what happens next:

Scene 3 (vs. 24-33)

²⁴ *The following day they came to Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends.*²⁵ *On Peter's arrival Cornelius met him, and falling at his feet, worshiped him...*

²⁶ *But Peter made him get up, saying, "Stand up; I am only a mortal."* ²⁷ *And as he talked with him, he went in and found that many had assembled;* ²⁸ *and he said to them, "You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean."* ²⁹ *So when I was sent for, I came without objection. Now may I ask why you sent for me?"*

³⁰ *Cornelius replied, "Four days ago at this very hour, at three o'clock, I was praying in my house when suddenly a man in dazzling clothes stood before me."*³¹ *He said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God.'* ³² *Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon, who is called Peter; he is staying in the home of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.* ³³ *Therefore I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. So now all of us are here in the presence of God to listen to all that the Lord has commanded you to say."*

-What do you make of v. 28 where Peter says, *You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean??* **Do you think he realized how condescending that sounded?**

It's almost like Peter said, *I live by God's law, so I would **not** have come **your** house – except **God** told me I had to!!* Doesn't that kind of sound like an older brother who gets in trouble for picking on a younger sister? So he says (in a snarky voice): *Mom says I have to apologize...so, sorry!* ***It's a statement that just doesn't seem to come from Peter's heart.***

-What's **also** interesting to note is that neither the **angel** who **appeared** to **Cornelius**, nor the **Spirit** who **spoke** to **Peter**, said **anything** about Peter needing to speak. That comes from Cornelius who tells Peter that he was summoned so that they might hear *all that the Lord has commanded you to say*. **And, like every other pastor in the world – if given an opportunity to speak, we can't not talk!!!**

Scene 4 (vs. 34-36, 43-48)

³⁴ *Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵ but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶ You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all... ⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."*

⁴⁴ *While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. ⁴⁵ The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, ⁴⁶ for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, ⁴⁷ "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" ⁴⁸ So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.*

This whole story has traditionally been called the *Conversion of Cornelius and His Household*. And that's **true** – they are **all** blessed by an outpouring of the Holy Spirit and become servants of the Risen Christ in dramatic fashion.

But, this is **also** a story of someone **else's** conversion too, right? **Who else is converted here?** It's **Peter** – he rides into town in a little minivan that **only** has room for people who watch **what** they eat and **how**. Yet in a **moment**, in a **split second**, in the **twinkling** of an **eye**, the Holy Spirit waves its wand, says, ***Bibbity-bobbity-boo***, and that little minivan is turned into a **big old party-bus** with signs plastered all over it saying, **Everybody Welcome!!!**

I would have **loved** to have seen Peter's face at the moment when the Spirit went to work. **Did you notice when the Spirit acted? Right in the middle of poor Peter's sermon!**

Poor Peter indeed! He thought he'd been invited there to **dazzle** these Gentiles with his *persuasive preaching*, his *eloquent oratory*, his *sensational sermon*. **Instead**, the Spirit says to him: *Pete, we already got that covered. How about you roll up your sleeves, baptize these people, and make sure they believe that they are as clean in the eyes of God as anybody else in the world...and then mop up the floor so nobody slips and hurts themselves... What God has made clean, you must not call profane!!!*

So what's the message of this story for us? Any ideas?

I can think of a couple of things:

1. We need to be careful about how we compare ourselves to other people – and I truly mean **WE**. For I must confess that **I** think of **us** as **better** people than **lots** of other folks in the world...
2. Secondly, I think it's kind of funny – and very telling – that this is the second time when Peter is interrupted by God.
 - The **first** time is on the **Mount of Transfiguration** when Jesus meets with Moses and Elijah – Peter gets nervous and starts babbling about building each guy a little hut. In Matthew 17:5 we read, *While he was still speaking, a cloud overshadowed him and a voice said, This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!*
 - The **second** time is in **today's** story in v. 44: *while Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word!!*

The message here, I think, is a simple one. Says the old adage: **God gave us two ears and one mouth so that we may listen twice as much as we speak.**

The more we listen to our neighbors – the more we'll discover that we're much more alike than we are different, and we'll learn – again and again – that God's Spirit is out there, loose in the world, preparing all people to receive the good news of God's love and grace through Jesus Christ. We don't even have to talk that much – we just need to show up and trust that the Spirit is in control. Amen.