

God Shows no Partiality*

Acts 10

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Sixth 6th Sunday of Easter Year B

Christ Church, Mt. Pleasant

Ever come in when your spouse is in the middle of watching a mystery or an espionage movie? You sit down, put your feet up and try to figure out what's going on. Who are the good guys? Who should you believe? Whose side are you supposed to be rooting for? When I'm totally confused, I try to casually ask questions...so are they a couple? Who is she working for? I don't know about your experience, but I find that my spouse is always super excited when I try to catch up like that....

It's like that with the reading from Acts we heard this morning.

We've come in the middle of the story. Questions of who's in, who's out predominate. The same author who wrote Luke's Gospel, wrote the Book of Acts and in it the author details the story of the early church becoming, forming, extending, expanding and some of the central questions are:

Who gets to be a member?

Who gets to lead?

Is a new faith forming—or is this a sect of Judaism?

Up to this point, it is presumed that if you wanted to be a follower of Jesus you were Jewish, and if you weren't Jewish, then you needed to be willing to convert and live within Jewish laws and regulations. Observant Jews weren't eating pork or shellfish, the men were circumcised and non-Jews, foreigners and gentiles, were largely looked upon askance by the Jewish community. They are not us, and we are not them.

Thus is the world of the early Church. Good thing we've come so far....

Previously in the book of Acts, the apostle Peter has been out on a balcony praying. And he has apparently worked up an appetite during his prayers so now he is hungry. Very hungry. Then he has this dream, this vision. It is a weird dream. It may well be one of the few, foody dreams in all of scripture.

In his hunger Peter has a vision of a linen cloth coming down out of heaven. Inside the cloth are all sorts of four-legged animals, reptiles and wild birds. He hears a voice that says, "Peter. Get-up. Kill and Eat!"

To which Peter, the observant Jew says, "No never. I have never eaten anything impure or unclean. It was clear there were definitely some non-kosher items on that linen tablecloth.

But the voice from heaven replies, **“Never consider unclean, what God has made pure.”** Just to be sure the voice says this to Peter three times. (Threes are kind of important to Peter...). **“Never consider unclean, what God has made pure.”**

Peter has no idea what to make of this dream.

Meanwhile, Cornelius, a centurion, in the Roman army, who happened to be a very Godly and faithful man was also praying. He too had a dream, a vision. In the midst of his prayers a being, a messenger of God appeared before him and said, your prayers have been noticed by God. Now you must find and send for a man named Simon, also known as Peter, you will find him in a house near the seacoast.

So Cornelius, believes the dream, hears the call and sends messengers to find this Simon also known as Peter.

The messengers show up at Peter’s house just after he has had his “Top Chef” vision. Peter, surprised at the presence of a messengers from a Roman Centurion at his door, nonetheless, invites them in and hears their request to go and meet their commander.

Peter agrees and travels back to Cornelius.

When Peter walks in Cornelius, the Roman centurion, falls on his face before the Jew.

Peter says no, “Do not worship me, I’m must a man, like you.”

Cornelius gets up and he and Peter continue to talk and walk into the next room where Peter sees an entire group of gentiles assembled, to meet with him. Peter says, “it is forbidden for a Jew to visit with gentiles. However, God has recently shown me that I should never call a person impure.”

Tell me—why did you ask me here?

Then Cornelius tells him of his dream. They realize that both of their dreams happened at the same time.”

Peter says, “I am learning that God shows no partiality to any group of people over another.”

In the midst of Peter talking,

the Holy Spirit comes to Cornelius and the gentiles, just as the Spirit came upon the apostles at Pentecost. It’s happening again, and this time the gentiles are able to speak in different tongues, languages of different nations.

Peter is astonished. How is it that God has just given the gentiles the same gifts the Holy Spirit gave to Jesus’ remaining 11 apostles.

Peter asked, "What now prevents me from baptizing these gentiles?"

We share so much...

God loves them as God loves us.

Call no person impure or unclean.

God shows no partiality to one group of people over another.

God shows no partiality to one group over another—a reality, we in our polarized country would do well to remember and embody.

Two different groups of people, heard the call, and went out of their way to meet.

Two different groups of people, Romans and Jews, the powerful and the oppressed, center and margins, took the risk to extend a hand and meet.

God's hope, God's will is revealed.

Transformation, baptism by the Holy Spirit, happens when both Cornelius and his people and Peter and his people go out of their way to meet.

Change happens when both go out of their way to offer hospitality,

Conversion happens when both groups are willing to risk setting aside the cultural, racial, and religious barriers of the day to meet, to talk, to listen, to learn.

As it was then, may it be so now...

Imagine the state of our country, our communities, our congregations if all of us extended ourselves to the ones we do not know, the ones we may not understand.

Come Holy Spirit Come.