

Acts 10:9-16

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

Acts 10:34-48

Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ - he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who at and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. 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, for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.

I. who is Peter

II. what was his struggle (law - dietary, purity, defining who was in and who was out)

III. how did he convert? (divine reformation)

IV. What is our struggle (because of law, who are we keeping out, not even giving value, given up on?)

V. is God calling us to a conversion (why would God call us to reform?) Not calling people profane or unclean, Good News cannot be kept to one's self - no partiality

Sermon

What are your slow conversions?

Peter was the one Jesus said, "On you I will build my church." He was the default leader of the early church, the person the other apostles looked to as a guide giving vision and direction for the people of the way. For Catholics, Peter is considered the first pope, for all Christians, Peter is the first evangelist. And we learn a lot about who Peter was as a church leader by reading the Acts of the Apostles. One of the key perspectives for Peter was that he, like all Jesus' disciples, was a Jew. He was raised in the traditions and laws of the Hebrew faith.

It is from this Jewish perspective that the early church was born. After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to chose Jewish people. At pentecost, it was Jewish men and women who first heard the good news in their own native languages. And so it would only make sense that this new movement, that the people of the Way, were still Jewish people who followed Jesus as the promised messiah of the Jews. And so Peter, along with the other apostles, focused their evangelism, sharing the good news of Jesus with other Jews.

This perspective was probably the first major conflict within the Christian movement. While the apostles looked to Peter for their direction, Paul was not part of the inside group. He was a Jew, but he was not with Jesus before his death and resurrection. Paul had a conversion experience with the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus. And in that conversion, Paul understood his calling was to share the Good News with people outside of the Jewish tradition, with the Gentiles. And so these two perspectives conflicted with each other, Peter and Paul publicly disagreeing with one another about who and how one would follow Jesus.

Then, one day, we find Peter and some of his friends making a journey. They decide to stop at a friends house in Joppa, Peter the tanner. By the time Simone Peter arrives he is starving. Now lets remember that there are no microwaves or fast food or jimmy johns delivery. To prepare food for a meal could take an hour or more to prep the fire and get the food ready and cooked. So Peter decided to get away from it all for awhile, he decided to go up on the roof.

Have you ever been up on a roof, flat or pitched, one story, two, maybe a high-rise in a big city, even looking out the windows of a skyscraper. It is amazing what can happen when you suddenly find yourself with a new perspective on the world. You look out, and the world seem to go on forever, you look down and every thing seems much smaller, you look up and heaven seems to be nearer than before.

Peter goes up on the roof, and there he finds a new perspective. Weather from hunger or exhaustion, Peter begins in prayer and moves to what the scriptures call a trance. In this meditative state, Peter has a vision, a table cloth of food descending from heaven, lowered with all kinds of animals that the Jewish law and tradition have named unclean. A voice tells Peter to eat, but Peter replies, "I've never eaten this before, it is not

kosher.” But the voice said, “Don’t call something unclean that I have made clean.” This sequence repeated itself three times before Peter awoke from his vision. And just as he wakes, three servants of Cornelius arrive to invite Peter to come to their gentile master. Peter looks down on these three gentile servants from his location on the roof, and his perspective has changed.

What lenses do we look through when we look at the world, at the church, at strangers - people who we don’t know or people we believe we should stay away from? What snap judgements do we make? What choices have lead us to include some, and omit others from our life, our church, even our conversations? What would it take for us to gain a new perspective - to walk in someone else’s shoes - to consider the ways we have more in common than different.

Peter arrived at Cornelius’ house and began by saying, “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.” Suddenly Peter understood that nationality and cultural traditions were not barriers to receiving the Good News and welcoming people to follow the risen Lord. May God open our eyes to see beyond our barriers and find new ways to share the gospel and welcome all who seek to follow Jesus in their lives. Amen