



Sixth Sunday Easter 2006

Acts 10: 25-48 1 John 4: 7-10 John 15: 9-17

To understand today's reading from Acts unless we begin at 9:32. The section begins with Peter engaged in pastoral visitation. He visits the young communities at Lydda and Joppa and wherever he goes good things happen. The sick are healed and the dead are raised.

Peter must have felt on top of the world. He felt so affirmed in his ministry. His belief in God, in the mission of the raised Jesus, and the dawn of a new age of hope, gave him great joy.

Then something happened that would bring Peter, and the followers of the new way, a powerful challenge.

It happened simply enough with an annunciation. A man was at prayer. An angel of the Lord appeared and spoke, "Cornelius, your prayers and just actions have come before God. Send for a man called Simon Peter, he is at Joppa."

The next day as the friends of Cornelius. were making their way to Joppa, Peter had gone up onto the flat roof to have a quiet period of prayer. It was high noon. He became hungry so he asked his hosts for lunch. The story says that Peter went into a sort of trance. He saw the sky torn and a great sling being lowered. It was held by the four corners. As it came closer to the ground Peter saw that it was filled with animals; mammals, birds, reptiles, and insects. Then Peter heard a voice saying, "Get up and eat." Remember he said he was hungry.

Peter replied, "No, Lord, I do not eat those things that our religion places on the forbidden list."

Peter's response showed his level of shock at the strange command even though he intuited that it was the Lord who was speaking.

The answer came, "If God calls something clean, what gives you the right to call anything unclean or not holy?"

This vision was repeated three times.

While Peter was pondering these things in his heart, the delegation arrived from Caesarea requesting to speak with him.

When Peter met Cornelius, the story tells us, he understood the vision. He entered the home of Cornelius and began by reminding the household that his tradition made visiting the homes of non-Jews unlawful, and that even association with Gentiles was frowned on.

Then he began again to explain that he had been brought to a new vision of the world under God. "God has shown me that all creation is good and that I must not regard any person as profane or unclean."

The story makes this conversion of Peter as something instant but the reality of the enormous shift in understanding took a long time. The baptism of Cornelius and his household signified a tangible sign of Pentecost but there was still a long way to go before there was acceptance of the universality of the developing Christian church. Peter went on to say that he could now see that God has no favourites. Any person who seeks God and lives a Godly life is of God. There are no boundaries.

Without this embracing of the vision the group would have remained on sect among many within Judaism.

What emerges is an inclusive community of an all-embracing God. A community born of the transformation of Resurrection will go forth to proclaim the presence of God among humankind. God present among us, in us, surrounding us is a sign of hope.

As John says in the Gospel, this great vision of the tangible presence of God is impossible without love. We are no longer servants waiting around to be told what to do. We are friends. This inclusive love enables us to know how to act as God would have us act.

The inclusive love revealed in our Trinitarian God will be our source of strength. Today as the world seeks to magnify divisions, we need to proclaim the message of love and support for our brothers and sisters regardless of their different pathways to God.

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