

Pastor Roy's sermon from May 10, 2015 (Mother's Day)

Up to this point, chapter 10 in Acts, all the followers of the way of Jesus were Jews. What interest would Gentiles have in following the Jewish law and ways? Sure, the Jews worshiped the God of the Universe, not just of Palestine or wherever Jews took up residence, but their faith was so Jewish. Oh, Jesus had healed a few Gentiles, but that was rare, and yes, there were God fearing Gentiles, but they could only go so far in the temple, so how could they be full followers of Jesus? The Spirit was with the apostles and faithful followers of Christ. The people who were responding in the cities of the Roman Empire were from the synagogues. They were Jews. The apostles and followers didn't think beyond this. At least, not yet.

Then one day, Peter was waiting for dinner, pondering a ministry situation or maybe his next sermon. Oh, did I mention that Peter was staying at the home of Simon the tanner? Tanners handled dead animals. They were unclean. There were off limits places for them in the temple, too. If Peter is staying at the tanners home, then this early church is concerned for clean and the unclean Jews alike. All Jews, were beloved people of God. They reflected Jesus' love which reflected God's love for all the people, not just certain ones.

So Peter is dozing off while praying, and his dozing turns into a memorable vision dream. He's hungry and waiting for dinner and there were no chips or pretzels to snack on. Perhaps you've heard the vision before, a sheet lowers from heaven, filled to the brim with unclean animals according to ritual law in Leviticus. Not to be eaten by observant Jews. He hears God's voice, "Get up, Peter, kill and eat." Oh, no, I've never eaten such things. The voice comes back, "What God has made clean, you must not call unclean." This happens 3 times. After the third time, Peter is awake now, and thinking about this vision. Could God want me to eat unclean food? Hmmm.

As Peter thinks, the Spirit says, "Three men are looking for you, don't hesitate, go with them."

Sure enough, there they were, down on the first floor. "Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God fearing man, well-spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, he was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and listen to your message."

Peter--Stay here overnight and we will go in the morning. As they eat, most likely in separate rooms, Peter begins to understand the vision of what and who is clean in the sight of God.

They travel and reach their destination. He speaks immediately to Cornelius and all. "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. He tells about Jesus, his ministry, his death, and resurrection; concluding, "everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

(pause)

After this word, the Spirit, without Peter's invitation, enters the people who hear the word. They have been eagerly waiting for this word. They embrace Peter's words, the Gospel. Peter does not give the Spirit. The Spirit moves without invitation or request. Her presence is obvious and unmistakable. The Spirit opens the invitation to baptism. It is time, and Peter knows it. He looks at his fellow circumcised believers, and asks, "Is it conceivable that we should allow our old traditions to stand in the way of the Spirit of God who has clearly trumped our assumptions about who is clean and unclean? And they were baptized.

How did Peter know that it was ok to welcome the Gentiles? He listened to the Spirit. The vision. Then the Spirit made it clear. The evidence was the Spirit's presence in the previously unclean people. They were now speaking the language of love and praise for God. The fruit of the Spirit would be evident in their lives.

Jesus had given a new commandment—to abide in love, to live in love, to be committed to love, whatever the cost. Jesus says, “You are my friends if you live in love.” John’s Jesus says this right after his reminder that he has laid down his life for them, and that is what it means to love.

B: The cleansing of baptism is a cleansing in love. Being named a child of God is a gift of the Spirit. We are merely watching, taking note that the Spirit is present here in this place by acts of love and faithfulness. Here we bless one another. Here we bless Eli whom the Spirit of God has already blessed with life and love. The power is in the Spirit. The church is the working of the Spirit in the Body of Christ, nothing more, nothing less.

E: The love and commitment of a mother to her child is a sign of this love. So today we recall Jesus’ love for his friends, Peter’s willingness to push out the limits of faithful love, and we give thanks for the love of mothers.

E & B: The invitation to love comes to us all. Put yourself out for love. Let us lay down our lives, every day, for love. Each morning, pick up the pieces and love. Each evening, remember the mercy of God, prepare for rest, and a new adventure in love the next day. Love is the way of the creator. If we lost sight of love, we live in pain and brokenness. The way of healing is give and receive love.

B: God bless Eli and his family.

E&B: God bless us all in our journey of love as we remember that love is the essence of life in the Spirit—As Peter learned it is not a group or personal brand of goodness or cleanness or morality according to cherished values. Love is listening carefully to the leading of the Spirit to love and welcome those whom God welcomes and loves. Thanks be to God. Amen.