

“Am I in or on God’s Way?” - Acts 11.1-18 - Rev. Jeffrey B. Childs

Hear these words again: *“So, if God gave **them** the same gift, he gave **us** who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand **in God’s way**?”* (Acts 11:17) Today we hear a fascinating story, or more accurately a retelling of a fascinating story. If you have been reading the Acts of the Apostles you would have discovered that the story told this morning was actually told in the preceding chapter. Peter followed the Holy Spirit, the vision seen and the word of God heard in this vision. Like the story of the apostle Paul last week, not only did something happen to the main character – there Paul had a vision of Jesus that blinded him on the road to Damascus – and another disciple named Ananias also had a vision that he was to go and heal Paul and restore his sight. Well, here with the Apostle Peter there is a similar thing as he has a perplexing vision while sitting up on a roof top while a Gentile named Cornelius has a vision of an angel instructing him to send for Peter to come and offer him the way to salvation. God is at work at each end of the visions! And I believe God still is.

I believe we still need to “see” Peter’s vision for what it is. It was not literally about the strict kosher dietary laws, though on the surface that is what it might look like at first. A sheet coming down from heaven with all manner of animals – both clean and unclean as described in the book of Leviticus chapter 11. Now, I can identify with Peter, who it says was hungry as he was waiting for the meal to be ready - so he dreams of food! And if that was what it was all about, I would have expected him to wake up and say, “I want some bacon!” (Pork is one of the “unclean foods” for the Jews.) And as big, if not even bigger, was a law preventing Jews from eating with non-Jews. And in the story this morning it was not about what Peter ate that had people upset, it was that he sat down and ate with “Them!” It had been bad enough that Jesus had eaten with sinners, and that too caused some tongues to wag back in the day!

This is an “us and them” story or more importantly how the “them” can become a part of “us!” Who are the “us and them” for you? Over the years it may have been the Irish or Poles, Jews or Muslims, Blacks or Asians. We have been good at separating ourselves from others. I am reminded of an old Quaker saying that helps me understand how some people can shut themselves off from the whole rest of the world by thinking they are the only ones who are right. It goes like this, “The whole world is odd, except thee and me...and sometimes I wonder about thee!” Sometimes “us” might become so small it is only “me.” But the message from God to Peter and Cornelius this morning is to help us understand that the God who is for us is not just for a small number of us but for all of us, all manner of us; a world full of us. And like Peter, we have a job to do. There are some of God’s “us” that do not know they are a part of “us!” Who are the “us” who are not here with us? Do we need to find new ways to go to them and meet them where they are rather than expect them to come to us and to be like us? I wonder where all God might lead you into the future under Pastor Bonnie’s leadership?

As followers of Jesus, who are we and how open and large is our “us?” Here in this story there were some upset with Peter and his openness! When we have talked about being a

denomination of “Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors” the question has been, how open are we? (BTW there is a new visions statement – talk with your new pastor about it!)

How open is your Jesus? Paul wrote these words to the early church, the differentiating categories may be different today, but does this still ring true if we translate it? *There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.* (Galatians 3.28) What if we asked about Rich and Poor? Or Catholic or Protestant? Or Republican or Democrat? Or Black or White? Or Gay or Straight? Or American or Immigrant? Is your Jesus big enough to allow us all to be one in Him? Peter went to offer salvation to Cornelius, to let him know the Good News that Jesus had died and rose for his sake, too. And as Peter preached, the Holy Spirit came upon the Gentiles. It was another Pentecost experience! (For us Pentecost is still three weeks away, but here in this story it had happened nine chapters earlier in Acts 2!) If God’s Spirit can come upon “them” like upon “us” Peter concludes then, we are all a part of God’s “us.”

Several years ago, I read a book “Dare to Dream” by Rev. Mike Slaughter and it transformed my ministry. It was a sermon series he had preached to his congregation on how to be like Peter and to dream and catch God’s vision. I shared it with you when I first came here. Like Peter and Cornelius in this story, and with Pastor Bonnie as you continue your story, dare to dream and dare to follow that dream. After the dream, Peter could have just pondered the meaning, gone down to dinner, and talked with his friends about it. But, so much more happened when he actually followed the dream and the invitation to go to Cornelius’ house! The church will grow as we reach out and welcome people and “us” becomes larger than just us. Pray with me that God’s vision will continually be before us as we reach out to all of the “us” around us. Alleluia and Amen.

Peter Had a Vision (Acts 10-11)

Jeffrey B. Childs 5/12/25

Peter had a vision.
Cornelius had one too.
Peter received a mission,
Of what he was to do.

He preached to Cornelius,
And all there who would hear it,
Of the death and life of Jesus,
They received the Holy Spirit.

A sheet came down from glory,
Filled with animals to eat.
God solidified the story,
Three times it did repeat.

Peter fully understood,
The meaning of the vision.
He must do all he could,
To share the Great Commission.

Peter pondered this revelation,
About what all it meant.
At Cornelius’ invitation,
Peter went where he was sent.