

Easter is still upon us. Today we celebrate the third week of Easter. Jesus has been resurrected and has shared the great commission for his disciples to spread the word and the Good News that he has taught them. He has asked us to not only live the righteous life that he has shown us, but for us to continue on and teach others how to live.

In today's reading from Acts, Luke is sharing with us the conversion of Cornelius. And he is sharing with us the beginning of Peter's missionary work. The two together show us the beginning of the Gentile Christian church. Peter is taking Jesus' teachings and sharing them with the world and not just other Jews.

We begin with Luke telling us about the Roman Cornelius. There are a couple of significant items that Luke points out about him. First he says that Cornelius and his house are God fearing. During this time, the descriptor of god fearing means that someone is a gentile, but practices Jewish ritual to a point. They participate in prayer and righteous living, but they do not go through baptism or circumcision.

This devoutness is further depicted by Luke emphasizing the 3 PM prayer. This would be an afternoon prayer that all Jewish people participate in. Even though Cornelius is not a Jew, he still participates in afternoon prayer. At this time is when the second point happens.

While Cornelius is praying, an angel comes to him. The angel tells Cornelius that God has taken notice of his prayers and offerings. And he is now to find Peter and talk with him. We know that even though Cornelius is a gentile, he lives enough of a righteous life that God recognizes him. This would be considered unheard of for a nonJew. So, Cornelius now sends his slaves to find Peter.

The next part of today's reading, we start to follow Peter, and we learn about his vision. The heavens open up and various animals are lowered to him on a sheet. He sees a number of different four-footed animals, reptiles, and birds and is told to kill them and eat them.

As a devout Jew, Peter could not eat most of these animals. All of his life he was told that they were unclean and eating those would be against the will of God. And now he is having a vision from God telling him it is alright to eat them. Peter gets very distraught over his vision.

Jesus has told Peter that it was not his intention to change the old laws, but he was on earth to share about God's love. There were some laws that Jesus told them that God was not as concerned about as much as he was with everyone leading a righteous life. And Jesus had told him that it was alright for him to eat animals that he had been told all of his life was wrong.

But now Peter was having a vision from God that made him question what he thought he knew. We've talked about a situation like that before. What would you do if something that you had known to be true most of your life suddenly changed? You were told that you couldn't do something and now you can. What would that make you think?

While Peter was trying to figure this out, the Holy Spirit came to him and told him about the slaves that were sent for him. He told him to not be afraid and go with them. The slaves found Peter and they spoke. And at the end of the discussion, Peter did something profound, he invited them to stay the night in his lodging.

This would have been unheard of during this time period. Jews and gentiles would not have stayed together. They would have barely interacted together. But, now they are sharing meals and sleeping under the same roof. We are starting to see the breakdown of religious barriers. Yes, the Romans are god fearing, but that does not make them equals to the Jews.

The next morning Peter and the Romans leave for Cornelius' home. When they reach it, Peter speaks with Cornelius about why he sent for him. Cornelius explains his vision to Peter and Peter starts to understand his vision and why God sent him to Cornelius.

Peter realizes that God doesn't see everyone differently. He sees people that pray and show genuine concern for others. His love and his teachings are truly for everyone that wants to live a righteous life, but more importantly wants to hear his word.

God's love isn't meant for just one group of people. It is meant for everyone. He doesn't care who you are, what the color of your skin is, or what your gender is. He loves all of us and spreads the Holy Spirit through everyone. The kingdom of heaven is there for all who believe and live a righteous life. The rest of it is irrelevant.

This scripture is another example of God speaking to us in ways that we can hear him. Peter realizes why God has sent him to Cornelius. He sees that God wants everyone to know that his word is for everyone and not just the Jews. He wants them to know that the kingdom of heaven is for everyone as well. But Peter doesn't know exactly how much.

He didn't know until he saw the Holy Spirit fill these unbaptised people. They started speaking in tongues and sang praises to God. What does it mean when we say "they were speaking in tongues"? I had always thought that it meant the people were babbling. But, it doesn't. The literal translation is that they can speak a language they did not know. So, all of these people around Peter could be speaking in Hebrew and he understands them without the need of his interpreter.

This act from the Holy Spirit is God telling Peter that anyone who lives a righteous life can be recognized by God and given the Holy Spirit. The spirit is not just reserved for those who have been baptized, but is for all that God feels worthy. We are not to judge, he takes care of that.

**God of all nations, you made it clear that all people are invited to partake of the glory of your salvation. Help us to invite all people to your goodness, so that no one might be forgotten in your saving grace. We pray these things in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.**