



Sunday, January 21, 2024

Speaker: Pastor John VanderWindt

Scripture: Acts 10:17-48

Sermon Title: Responding to God's call

We're looking at **Acts 10** today. You may remember last week, we had the first part of the story Acts 10. We're going to begin at **Acts 10:17** today. Last week, we looked specifically at Cornelius, the Roman soldier, and Peter, a fisherman made disciple. The two of them and how they were different but how God was preparing them for his mission, for his opportunity to share the Word.

So today, we're going to start our reading starting in **Acts 10:17**. If you remember the story from last week, it will be repeated in today's reading. It was basically where Cornelius had an angel come to him and told him to go get Peter, who was staying at the house of Simon, the tanner. And while Peter was on the roof, he had a vision of a sheet coming down with what the Jews would have called unclean food. He was told to get up, kill it and eat it. And that's kind of where we left it at the end of last week. We left actually in verse 17, where it says, "**17** While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate." Cornelius had sent three men down and Peter is now on top. And so here we continue our reading. It says...

18 They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there. **19** While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three[a] men are looking for you. **20** So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them."

21 Peter went down and said to the men, "I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come?"

22 The men replied, "We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to ask you to come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say." **23** Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.

Peter at Cornelius's House

The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the believers from Joppa went along. **24** The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends.

25 As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. **26** But Peter made him get up. “Stand up,” he said, “I am only a man myself.” **27** While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people.

28 He said to them: “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean.

29 So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?” **30** Cornelius answered: “Three days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me **31** and said, ‘Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. **32** Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.’ **33** So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.”

34 Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism **35** but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. **36** You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. **37** You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached— **38** how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

39 “We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, **40** but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. **41** He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. **42** He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. **43** All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. **45** The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. **46** For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, **47** “Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.” **48** So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

This is the Word of the Lord. And we respond with thanks be to God. Let's pray. Dear Lord, we thank you for your Word. Lord, we thank You for how your Word is living and active. Lord, we thank You how Your Word pierces the heart and reminds us of what we have been called to do as Your disciples.

So, Lord, today we pray that our ears may be opened, that our hearts may be soft and moldable, that You will mold us into the people that You have called us to be. Lord, I pray that Your words may be spoken and that nothing of me may come through and that all the praise and glory may go to You. We pray this, Lord, because of Your love first for us, that we love You. Amen.

So here we have the story of Peter and Cornelius. Last week, we saw the differences between the two. We saw how God had called each of these men and how God was preparing them for the next. Today, we're going to extend that preparation and show how, in this preparation, God had been working in their lives. He now allows them to cross a major barrier in the sending of the gospel, which he had already said in Acts 1.

So let's begin with Peter on the roof. He had just had this vision. He was wondering what it meant. And he spent time there pondering. And as he was pondering, it says in **Acts 10:19**, "**19** ... the Spirit said to him... " Remember he had a vision in which he had seen things, and now he hears the Spirit say to him, "**20** ... (So) get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them."

When we read that, we think, "Oh, God is saying, 'You know what? Don't worry about it. Just go.'" But the word "hesitate" here is actually translated differently. Oftentimes throughout Scripture, this same word "hesitant" is the word for "do not judge" or "do not discriminate." So God is saying to Peter, "Go down. Do not judge against them. Do not discriminate against them. Because I have sent them to be with you." That is the beginning of the crossing of this barrier. Where the Spirit is telling Peter, "You need to go and you need to understand that they are as you are... an image bearer of God."

So in **Acts 10:21**, it says, "**21** Peter went down and said to the men, 'I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come?'" And the three that were sent by Cornelius explain why they came. Peter's reaction is quite unique in **Acts 10:23**. "**23** Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests. That's kind of a bold statement as well. Right? Imagine you're at a bed and breakfast and somebody comes to the door and you're like, "Hey, come on in." He's staying at Simon, the tanner's place who is a Jew. And without asking his permission, he's inviting in three Gentiles.

But we need to even back up for that one. He's staying at Simon, the tanner's house. In Jewish culture, a tanner, which is a person who deals with the hides of animals, is most of the time unclean. He is dealing with dead animals, which in Jewish customs, makes him unclean. So in some ways, Peter has already gone to a place which is, according to Jewish culture, not really a clean place. It's unceremoniously clean. But this is kind of an exception. We say, "Well, he's still a Jew. He still worships God. It's just that his job is this." But now he's inviting in other people which creates a bigger barrier breaker.

And so he says, "Come on in. Spend the night. Let's go tomorrow. And we'll go up and see Cornelius." Then, in the middle of **Acts 10:23**, it says, "The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the believers from Joppa went along. There are a couple of interesting pieces here. If you turn over to **Acts 11:12**, It says there, "**12** The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man's house.

So in **Acts 11**, he's telling the story to the people and saying, "Here's why I did what I did." And there we get the six brothers. So Peter takes six people with him. Six people to go to talk to Cornelius. Notice Peter doesn't go alone. God doesn't call us into a place, which is a major aspect of going by ourselves. But God gives people to go with us and to support us. This week, Heather and Siggie are going to the Philippines as that word of encouragement to the ministers who are doing God's mission in the Philippines. We need each other, to encourage each other, to spread the gospel. We need to be with each other for that. But then it reminds us that he's going to Caesarea.

Now, I don't know if you remember this but let's go back to the end of **Acts 8**. Do you remember in Acts 8, which I realized we had Lent in between, so it's like way too long ago to remember. But at the end of Acts 8, after Philip had been with the eunuch, it says in **Acts 8:40**, "**40** Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea." Here is Philip, the person who went to the Ethiopian eunuch, and he lives in Caesarea. And you might be thinking, "Lord, I don't want to tell you what to do but wouldn't it have been easier if you would have just told them. 'Hey, Cornelius, down the road on the left, there is a guy by the name of Philip. He can help you out.'" But no. God says, "You need to have Peter come."

And there are parts of this where you go, "You know, this fits with what Christ said." When he says to Peter, "I will build my church." And this is a significant piece in the building of the Church of God. It's also Peter who was given the keys to the kingdom. This is an important piece of unlocking the doors and opening up the kingdom of God for all people. So Peter is sent to Caesarea.

So Peter gets there a day later. He gets to Cornelius's house. He finds out that Cornelius in **Acts 10:24**, it says, "**24** Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends." Cornelius understood the significance of Peter coming. Now we'll see in just a minute how he misplays who Peter is, but he understands that when God says, "Get someone here who is going to speak for me," you don't keep that to yourself. You invite your family. You invite your neighbors and friends to hear the voice of God.

And we too, as believers, invite our families and we invite our friends to come to church with us to hear God's word and what God has to say to us each week. And maybe we don't dare go out of the house and so we are online. But we gather our families together and we watch with family to hear what God is saying. God can speak to us individually and he speaks to us as a group. And as we hear God's word, then we can also discuss God's word and we can discern what God is saying to us.

And so we gather in Connect groups, in small groups to discuss, "What did we hear from God and how do we put that into our lives?" So Cornelius did that with the other people. And there he is.

And so, while they were talking with him, Peter went inside the house. And he says to them in **Acts 10:28, "28 ...** "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile." Now, what's interesting here is the word "Gentile." It is the same word used for "nation." And so here you see how God is saying to Peter, "Peter, as the people of Israel, you have been told your entire life, you are it. You are my chosen people and all the nations of the world are not." And now God is saying to Peter, "Peter, I have opened the doors and I am inviting into my people all the nations of the world. They too, are my chosen people, my royal priesthood." That we are called to be the people of God.

And notice Peter's reaction in **Acts 10:28, "28** But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. 29 So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?" Peter understood very clearly what God was now saying in that vision. Peter understood that what God was saying was, "Everyone. Everyone is created in the image of God. That means all people."

Today, within the Christian Reformed Church, it is also National Sanctity of Human Life Day. And we are reminded in the sanctity of life, how all people are created in the image of God. From the time they are conceived throughout their entire life, whether they are fully functioning or whether they are disabled, it doesn't matter what your family background is or where you come from. You are created in the image of God. And God this morning says to each of us, "I love you and I died for you. And I invite you into this place to be in a relationship with me." So Peter understood that and he went there.

Do you remember where Peter came from? Joppa. Do you remember the other story that we have from Joppa? It's the guy by the name of Jonah. God told him to go to the Gentile as well. God told him to go to the nations which were not Israelites, and his first response was, "I don't think so. I'm going the other way."

Peter does the opposite. He turns and he says, "If God has called me to do this, I am going to do it." And he goes there, and then he asks a second time, "Why did you send for me?" It's interesting that Peter was not told why he was going. And this tells us a little bit about the way God works. God sometimes reveals to us places that we need to go to, or maybe God will nudge us and say, "You need to call so and so." Or in today's world, text them. You might have no idea why. And then you have a choice. "Do I follow that word of the Spirit - that nudging that comes to me to do so? Or do I not? And when you do, you might even say, "You know what? I have no idea why but I just knew that I needed to call you right now. How are you doing?" You'll find out. God is preparing you and them for that conversation.

And so Peter asked again, "Why did you send for me?" You know, this is similar to the way Peter was taught. If you look throughout the life of Christ, whenever he comes to a new person, one of the things he often says is, "What would you like from me?" He talks to the blind beggar in that way and says, "What do you want me to do for you?" He knows that sometimes we need to ask. But on the other end, sometimes we need to just say, "You know what? Even though I don't know why, I'm going to follow what God is calling me to do." And so he goes.

Then Cornelius tells of what happened a few days ago, but he adds one line. In **Acts 10:31**, it says, "**31** ... and (he) said, 'Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor.'" That wasn't mentioned in the first part but that's a significant piece. Right? He, in that line, tells Peter that it is an aspect coming from God who has heard Cornelius's prayers. It's not just on a whim. It is God working and it is Cornelius seeking God. And God is now saying to Peter, "I am going to give you the privilege of sharing the gospel with Cornelius."

So Cornelius tells them. Then Peter goes, and he explains to him, "Oh, okay. Well, you know about Jesus." Cornelius, being a Roman Centurion, would know about Christ. The whole Roman army would know about Jesus. So he begins to talk a little bit about Jesus. He says, "You know about Jesus." So he kind of starts where they are. And then he makes one difference - major difference - from the sermons which he had preached before. He mentions there in **Acts 10:39-40**, "**39** We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, **40** but God raised him from the dead..."

Do you remember the sermons which he preached to the Jews? Where he always said, "You did it." So he understands his audience. He understands who he's speaking with. Now, is it possible that Cornelius was involved in the death of Christ? We don't know. We have no idea whether Cornelius was in Jerusalem at that time or not. But could Peter have said to him, "The Roman soldiers killed Jesus." They were certainly involved. The order of execution had to come through the Roman government in order to have crucifixion. But yet he says, "They killed him." To help Cornelius understand that it is not an act of a government but is an act of individuals.

Last week, our verse was **Romans 6:23**, "**23** For the wages of sin is death..." We are all in that place. But then it goes on to say, "... but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." So we are all in that place. We are all part of the "they." And Peter says, "This is where it's at. That God raised him from the dead." And then he goes on and he shares the rest of the gospel with him.

Cornelius, his family, his friends all came to hear God's Word. At the beginning, Cornelius grabs Peter and bows down before him. And Peter's like, "Whoa. I'm just a man, like you." But then they asked to hear from God. And you know that in their listening, they are present, fully present. These people desired to come. They were not forced to come. They desired to come to hear the Word of God. And God responded in **Acts 10:44**, "**44** While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message." When we put ourselves in a place to hear God and when we are fully in that space, not just physically present, but emotionally and spiritually present, when we put ourselves in that place to hear God, God answers.

And it says that the Holy Spirit came upon them. I love the next line, **Acts 10:45**, "**45** The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles." Talk about the unexpected. Right? The believers who came with Peter are thinking, "You know, we're gonna go there, explain to these people will encourage them, as they are God-fearers in their faith, and show them how God works."

And then, the unexpected happens. The Holy Spirit shows up and it shows up in such a dramatic way that it says, "They spoke in tongues." It was obvious that the Holy Spirit had filled them and it shocked the people. It was like, "Hold on!" It was like the doors blew open and suddenly they realized their view of God was too small. And their view of who God's people were, was way too small. Because suddenly the doors of their church blew open and God said, "I've got people for you. And let me introduce them to you. And it's not just some. I've got people and I will bring them. And I will reveal to you whom I have called to be my child as well."

Then Peter says in **Acts 10:47**, "**47** Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water." One of the things which we say in the Christian faith, is that, "Yes, you can accept Christ by yourself. But it can never stay in that place. There needs to be a public demonstration that you are part of the family of God." And so we have baptism as that public demonstration. It is that public place where you say, "I understand God's grace for me, and I live in that space. I understand what God meant when he said, 'I will be the God of all nations.'" So Peter, and the people with him, baptize these people. They baptized Cornelius and his family. They baptized the guests, who came to hear the Word of God. And Peter welcomes them into the family of God.

And then it says in **Acts 10:48**, "**48** ... they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days." And he does. Peter understands that this is now his extended family. And he stays with him because he also understands that, as new believers, you need to be in a space where you can continue to learn. And that's not just for new believers. That's for all believers. We need to put ourselves in a place where we can continue to learn about what God is saying to us. That we are constantly in this place of desiring to hear God's Word and to hear more and more of how God is forming us as a community. How God is forming us as individuals, to live like Him and for Him. And to enjoy His presence and to give Him glory, both now and forevermore.

Let's pray. Dear Lord, we thank You. We thank you, Lord, that You have called each of us to be in Your family. And more, that you also call each of us to invite our families, and to invite our neighbors, and our close friends, to come to places where we can hear You speak. Lord, help us to act as Peter did. That when the Spirit nudges him and says, "Go without hesitation," that we too may follow Your calling. And without judgment or without discrimination, that we may choose to go where You have called us. And Lord, may we stay long enough to see the unexpected. Lord, may we stay long enough to see Your Holy Spirit fall on the people that You've called us to talk with. And Lord, may Your Spirit move among us. That we may live fully for You. And Lord, we can do this only because of Your great love for us. And we love You in return. Amen.

We just sang the gospel, "Christ died for us, and His wounds have paid our ransom." This week, as you do your life, may that be part of who you are. May it fill in you a desire to continue to grow deeper in your relationship with God. And to hear more about that, we invite you to come to the congregational meeting on Thursday. You'll hear some more ideas on that one.

But we also need to let you know of how we, as a church, are able to bless others. This past week, there was a church that made an agreement with us to come and use our buildings on Sunday afternoons. Starting in February, Equip Church will be meeting within our building. We're able to share this gift that God has given us with other people who are joining in this place to worship God. So, they were told about this yesterday. You'll find out more at the congregational meeting on Thursday. But what a great opportunity to open our doors for the love of Christ with other people.

So, as you go out this week, I invite you to hear these words of God and receive them as a gift. In your journeys to and fro, may God direct you. In your happiness and pleasure, may God bless you. In care, anxiety or trouble, may God sustain you. In peril and in danger, may God protect you. And may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and the God our Father, who loved us and by His grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, may that God encourage your hearts, strengthen you in every good deed and word and the grace of God, the love of Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

Transcribed by: *Liza Perry*