

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
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**Sunday After Ascension, May 8, 2016**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)  
Hymns: 377:1-6, 373:1, 498:1-4, 510, 500:1.  
Lessons: Isaiah 43:1-13, Acts 10:1-33, Luke 10:1-16.  
Sermon Text: Acts 10:34-48  
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Do you know that it has always been God's desire to save all souls all over the world throughout all history? At Pentecost the Holy Spirit gave believers the ability to speak in other languages which they had never learned. This was one way God intended to have believers – people like you and me – spread the Gospel throughout the world to all mankind. But if the Jerusalem Christians did not get moving into other cities and then to other countries, such souls would not learn of their salvation. So God had to show Peter and other disciples the importance of discovering that Gentile souls could also be saved through Jesus. Then each convert could also become a witness to Jesus in his own life situations, and so on and on, until today when even you and I are among the Gentiles blessed with the knowledge of the Savior. For if someone had not reached out of his or her comfort zone – perhaps centuries ago – we would not be among those who had heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ and come to faith.

Today let's look at a New Testament example of the need to reach out to others. We see such an example in the history of

**PETER AND CORNELIUS**

- 1. The good news about Jesus is for everyone.**
- 2. A Roman army officer is brought to know Jesus as his Savior,**
- 3. Teaching Peter – and us – that we must reach out to everyone.**

I think that every one of us has, at some time or another, felt that we “didn't belong”, that we weren't part of some chosen group. We may also have felt that way about others, that they shouldn't be part of “our group”. Today Scripture discusses what God wants from those of us who believe about those whom we might consider ‘outsiders’.

You have learned that Jesus Christ is the only way to eternal salvation. There is no other way to be saved. Jesus made that very clear when he said *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”* John 14:6 (NIV)

Luke, the writer of the book of the Acts of the Apostles, told us in our Epistle lesson about a Gentile named Cornelius who had come to faith in the God of the Israelites.

Cornelius was a Roman centurion, an army commander of 100 soldiers, at Caesarea. This city was the Roman capital of Palestine, named after Caesar Augustus, located on the Mediterranean seacoast about fifty miles northwest of Jerusalem. His soldiers were native Italians, not Israelites. Although Cornelius was sincere and dedicated to the true God, he was still lacking what Peter could bring him – the revelation that the Savior had already come to earth in the person of Jesus of Nazareth

Cornelius' prayers were reminders to God of his promises that included Gentiles in his boundless love for sinners. The angel mentioned these prayers to reassure Cornelius that he had been on the right track in his spiritual quest. God's next step was to enlist a Christian to come to his rescue. Following the angel's instructions, Cornelius sent three men to find Peter.

The Lord had to prepare Peter for the visit of the Gentile servants whom Cornelius sent in response to the message of God's angel. Peter's natural and Jewish misconception was that God's mercies did not include Gentiles. That's why God put the disciples into training to enlarge their understanding of his love.

To get Peter's willing cooperation in reaching out to Gentiles, God needed to make Peter's heart convinced about the breadth and depth of his redeeming love. That was the purpose of the vision of the animals in the sheet being lowered from heaven and the heavenly voice directing him to share in whatever God declared OK. Peter was up on the flat roof of the house. This group of animals contained those which were "unclean" and unacceptable to eat according to God's laws in Leviticus 11.

Peter was still accustomed to eating only those foods which God had declared "clean" or "kosher", a word which is still used today. The term "impure" indicates that it did not qualify for sacrificing, and unclean in that it was unfit for human consumption.

This concept of clean and unclean food was a constant reminder that God had his fingers on everyday Jewish life, including their food, their daily activities, their business dealings, their social customs and so on, and that he was in control of how he wanted people to worship him. Yet Peter did not readily surrender to God's insistence that he can revoke his own Levitical restrictions as he sees fit. Remember that Jesus Christ came to fulfill all God's laws perfectly for us, in our place. Peter had to learn that when God declares he has "cleansed" something no human has the right to still disapprove. After all, it is God who makes the rules for humans, not the other way around. Peter here learned God's will and explained that in the next chapter of Acts, when some Christians in Jerusalem were upset that Peter had ministered to Gentiles. In justifying what he had done because God had led him to do so, he said ***"So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?" When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, 'So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.'*** Acts 11:1-18 (NIV)

Since Peter had no stomach for non-kosher foods, he was confused as to whether he dared go against God's ancient regulations delivered through Moses. It was at this time that the delegation of Gentiles arrived from Cornelius. The Holy Spirit directed Peter to attend to the visitors, assuring him that they had been sent by God to find Peter, and that Peter could go along, free of conscience pangs about being in the company of Gentiles. They presented their cause to Peter, humbly explaining why they had come.

By now God's directions and Peter's love for souls had put aside his narrow Jewishness about "unclean" persons. The next day, in the right God-pleasing frame of mind, Peter set out for Caesarea, accompanied by six Christian friends. They were soon to get a new revelation of how God looked at Gentiles, and that would guide them in their mission to preach the Savior to all people.

Cornelius eagerly awaited the return of his servants with Simon Peter. He was prepared to greet them with a house full of relatives and friends who shared his devotion to Jehovah, the true God.

Peter asked why they had sent for him. So Cornelius reviewed what had happened and told Peter ***"Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us."*** Acts 10:33 (NIV)

Peter's sermon to Cornelius' household clearly reveals that he had come to learn God's love was large enough to cross over the ethnic barrier between Jew and Gentile. Peter spoke of how far God's love reaches, saying ***"I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right."***

The true Gospel message always includes the events Peter told of, with emphasis on the truth that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the anointed Savior whom God the Father sent to overcome death and sin through his sufferings, death, and resurrection.

The Holy Spirit also came to the Gentiles when the Word of God was preached. This should dispel any doubt lingering in the minds of anyone that God's love was broad and deep and long enough to bring Gentiles into his family. Here again Jesus' promise to bestow his Spirit upon his people was again honored as ***"the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message."*** In other words, they were converted then and there to faith in Jesus Christ. This was a new and marvelous discovery for the Christians of Jewish background, too, who up until now had not fully realized that their Jewish Jesus was also the Savior of the Gentiles.

We, too, have the calling, just as Peter did, to ***"Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."***  
Mark 16:15-16 (NIV)

We must be careful to rid our hearts of prejudice against others.

We must be careful that our social or cultural inhibitions do not hinder God's ministry of the gospel. The privileged responsibility and calling of the Christian in this world is to respond to any opportunity to speak the truth of God's Word in love.

God is indeed impartial, not prejudiced against any individual, race, or nationality. We realize that God looks on our heart for the right attitude and in our lives for the right effects when he has a special assignment lined up for us. God uses humans to tell the message of salvation to others.

No Christian ever dare have the attitude that "I got mine" and so I don't need to be concerned about others learning of salvation.

No Christian ever dare have the attitude that people of a different nationality or skin color shouldn't learn of Jesus Christ.

When we truly recognize our sinfulness and God's love in forgiving all our sins, we will also be excited about sharing that message of repentance and forgiveness with others of any skin color, race, or nationality.

In the next verses after our sermon text we read:

***"The apostles and the brothers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers [that is, the Jewish believers] criticized him and said, 'You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.' Peter began and explained everything to them precisely as it had happened: 'I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles, and birds of the air. Then I heard a voice telling me, 'Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.' I replied, 'Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.'" The voice spoke from heaven a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again. Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. 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. He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, "Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved." As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord had said: "John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?' When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, 'So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.'" Acts 11:1-18 (NIV)***

Since the good news of the forgiveness of sins is meant for everyone; that means it is meant for us and we can take comfort in it. It also means we can share it with others because it is meant for them too. May God guide us to be faithful, honest witnesses of his Word! Amen.