

April 24, 2016
Sermon for Fifth Sunday of Easter
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
Acts 11:1-18

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

Acts 11:1–18 (ESV)

¹ Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. ² So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, ³ “You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.” ⁴ But Peter began and explained it to them in order: ⁵ “I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, something like a great sheet descending, being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to me. ⁶ Looking at it closely, I observed animals and beasts of prey and reptiles and birds of the air. ⁷ And I heard a voice saying to me, ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat.’ ⁸ But I said, ‘By no means, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’ ⁹ But the voice answered a second time from heaven, ‘What God has made clean, do not call common.’ ¹⁰ This happened three times, and all was drawn up again into heaven. ¹¹ And behold, at that very moment three men arrived at the house in which we were, sent to me from Caesarea. ¹² And the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house. ¹³ And he told us how he had seen the angel stand in his house and say, ‘Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter; ¹⁴ he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.’ ¹⁵ As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. ¹⁶ And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ ¹⁷ If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?” ¹⁸ When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.”

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Amen.

In many Lutheran circles what's called the "common table prayer" is often said together before meals: "Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest, and let thy gifts to us be blessed. Amen." It's considered common, but newcomers to the faith or to Lutheranism wonder if this prayer is inspired or just brief and to the point.

Think about it, it may not be common to them. Yet it is a "common" prayer that unites the "in group," but it could exclude others.

So also with circumcision or unclean foods in the first century or with other modern divisions we ourselves create.

By contrast, our text today calls us to see that God's grace and promise go to all and bind all who believe together as Jesus' church.

We may be skeptical of God bringing to faith others outside our own circle (vv 1–3). We don't share a history. An outsider might not understand what we are doing and why we do it, and even worse, they might have a different way about them. They just don't seem to fit in!

The Jewish Christians in Jerusalem called into question Peter's actions of going to Gentiles. These people were different. Different customs, different dress, and they ate things that a good Jew would never consider eating. And they felt that they had good reasons for criticizing Peter.

In the Old Testament, God Himself had established a distinction of Israel from the Gentiles (Deut 7:1–6). Jews felt even eating with Gentiles would make them ceremonially unclean. Peter, you shouldn't hang out with those people, you might get something on you that you can't wash off.

Again, God had forbidden Israel to eat many foods the Gentiles ate (Deut 14:2–19).

But take note that Jesus ate with sinners and others that might not have fit in with the Jewish crowd as we see in Mark:

¹⁵ And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. ¹⁶ And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?” Mark 2:15–16 (ESV)

We may be unsure we can reach beyond our comfort zones. This might include traditions in our congregation that could be stumbling blocks to those on the “outside” being welcomed. Liturgical barriers because they do not understand how the service works, even though it is traditional, historical and Biblical. We don’t leave them to fend for themselves, hoping that they catch on, we can easily go and sit next to them, even if it isn’t our normal pew, and help them keep up with the service. Then they can experience the beauty of the historical liturgy.

It certainly does include any hesitancy about welcoming people into the Church because their backgrounds might seem suspicious to us.

God, though, leaves no doubt about His purpose to include everyone.

God made it very clear to Peter. He gave Peter a miraculous vision (vv 4–10) telling him that he (and we) should not take it upon ourselves to call something common or unclean if God Himself has made it clean.

Finally, God left no doubt (vv 15–17) as the Spirit descended on Peter and assured him that God has given all gentiles the same gift of the Spirit that they have been given. Again from our Text:

¹⁷ If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?” ¹⁸ When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.” Acts 11:17–18 (ESV)

We are those Gentiles, but so is everyone else around us; whether they dress, look or speak like us or not.

Today, God affirms His promises to include all people by the testimony of His Word.

This is the new covenant instituted with the shedding of Jesus' blood.

Jesus' death on the cross has paid for the sins of the whole world 1 John 2:2 (ESV)

² *He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.*

That's all people!

By Jesus' cross, the gifts of forgiveness and eternal life have been given to all who believe (v 17).

In the end, God calls all to faith through the same Word and Spirit.

Whether it's infant Baptism or adults being brought to faith, all are by God's Holy Spirit through His Word.

The Gospel message itself is beyond our reason. A free gift, totally free without any merit or worthiness of our own.

We think those who are "in" must somehow "rate" based on something in them or ourselves. But as Christians, we should know better; every one of us is "in" because Jesus paid for our membership in His body by dying for us—and only because He did it for you willingly.

We sometimes need to make sure not to stand in the Spirit's way, acting like Pharisees and adding requirements to earn or deserve God's grace and our salvation.

Simple things like making someone feel unwelcome, shunning them or not greeting them. Not offering help during the service, not volunteering in the nursery in case they need help with their children, any number of things that we take for granted can easily.

Any stumbling block can become a pharisaical "law" that blocks a person from worship, making them feel unwelcome or like a second class Christian.

When we invite Jesus to “be our guest,” it’s crucial to remember that we don’t really make up the guest list. *We’re* really always *Jesus’* guests at the heavenly table, always by His grace in giving His life for us.

So He just may be bringing other guests to the table with Him. Like the holiday meal to which some outside the family are invited, it’s something new for us to get used to.

But the gifts to us that we ask to be blessed—“let thy gifts to us be blessed”—just may be those new people.

Rejoice that your sins are forgiven in Christ Jesus...and furthermore, rejoice when the table is full of those that are receiving those gifts for the first time. Heaven is rejoicing, so let’s join in!

Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through the risen Christ Jesus.

Amen.

Sermon Outline

God’s Grace and Promise binds together all who believe.
(Acts 11:1–18)

- I. We may be skeptical of God bringing to faith others outside our own circle.
- II. God leaves no doubt about His purpose to include everyone.
- III. God calls all to faith through the same Word and Spirit.