

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, May 5, 2024.

"God's Expansive Welcome for All!" based on Acts 10:44-48

You have heard of BOGO, buy one get one free... Well today, you are going to get 4 for one... four sermons for the price of one. I will preach briefly on each lesson.

Our first lesson from Acts 10 is known as the Gentile Pentecost... it is when the Gentiles (the non-Jewish people) receive the Holy Spirit during Peter's sermon about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. This story continues to challenge me about the work of the Holy Spirit in the church today and expansiveness of God's love for all. There is no way Peter, a Jewish Person, should have gone to Cornelius' house, Roman Centurion, and a Gentile, to share a meal, preach, and baptize the whole household without the work of the Holy Spirit.

Psalm 98 invites us to sing a new song to the Lord, who has done marvelous things for us. What new song do you need to sing today? What do you need to do more of or less of in your life in order to deepen your relationship with God and find peace? As Christian artist Matthew West sings in the song Day One. "It's Day One of the rest or your life." Day one starts now.

Our 1<sup>st</sup> John 5 text lays out a proverb that needs a little explanation: "Everyone who loves the parent loves the child". In other words, when we love God and keep God's commandments, it will spill over into loving all of God's children. This promises not to be a burdensome thing, but life giving and a way to navigate our broken world.

In John 15, Jesus, who is about to leave the disciples behind, teaches them "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love. To abide in Jesus' love means to dwell with Jesus... to hang out with him on a regular basis. To treat him like a best friend... because that's what he calls us in this text... a friend. Like the song we sang, "This is my commandment that you love one another, as I have loved you."

Finally in this text, Jesus wants us all to experience joy in our lives. When we love others with the agape love of Jesus, you will find joy.

But the lesson that ties everything together for me is Acts 10. This lesson will change you. It will challenge the way you look at differences between people due to culture, race, religion, age, ability, sexual orientation, or any other way people are labeled. I take comfort in the fact that the Holy Spirit will continue to push me and the church into the inclusiveness and expansiveness of God's love.

Take Peter in our first lesson for example. Meeting Jesus and receiving the Holy Spirit changed the trajectory of his life. He went from a life of casting nets into the sea, to becoming a preacher and a healer. Imagine that. God uses ordinary people like you and me to share Christ with others.

Fast forward to Acts 10. The Holy Spirit clearly wanted the church to expand to the ends of the earth and include all people. But Peter was a human. He had his own biases like we do. One day when he was hungry, he had a vision... of a large sheet coming out of heaven. On it were all kinds of four-footed creatures, and reptiles, and birds of the air... things a Jewish person like Peter wouldn't eat. Then he heard a voice, "Get up, Peter, kill, and eat." Peter is like, "no way. I am not eating anything unclean." But the voice came again, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." This happened 3 times. Is that grace for Peter's 3-fold denial of Jesus?

Then the Holy Spirit, who was working on Cornelius on one end, and Peter on the other got them together. Peter was told to go without hesitation to Cornelius, a Roman centurion. You see, it was unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile, a non-Jewish person. But in the vision, God had shown Peter that he shouldn't call any human profane or unclean because of how God created them. So, Peter went as directed by the Spirit. That's the hard part. Following the Spirit's guidance for our life. Stay in the Word.

When Peter arrived at Cornelius' house, he began to speak about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection... and forgiveness, and the vision he just had. He said most beautifully, "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him."

And while Peter was speaking the Word, the Holy Spirit fell on the Gentiles. Those who came with Peter, mostly Jewish converts, were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. Then they received gifts of the Spirit and began to speak in tongues. And Peter here's water, what is to hinder me baptizing these people.

Then after this, Peter was called back to the home office in Jerusalem to do some splainin. They asked him one question... "Why were you eating with Gentiles?" Why are you crossing boundaries? He told them about his vision and responded, "Who am I to hinder God?". Then they agreed that even the Gentiles could receive the Holy Spirit and be a part of the church. If it were up to us humans, we would organize ourselves into homogeneous enclaves... like many churches and organizations today. But the Holy Spirit calls us to do otherwise.

What if we all lived our lives centered on a God who shows no partiality and to love one another as Jesus loves us? Our world would look different. Our attitudes toward others would be different. We would be more accepting of all and seek justice for the most vulnerable among us. Like Peter, the Holy Spirit moves us to change our way of thinking. But we got to listen!

In baptism we are marked with the cross of Christ and sealed with the Holy Spirit forever. The Holy Spirit awakens and creates faith in you. You have each been given a unique set of gifts to share with the world for the common good. Let us go boldly to share the expansiveness of God's love in Jesus in daily life. Amen