

WELCOME 20th June 2021 – 4 Pentecost '21 B

Acts 10

Welcome! It's great to be together. As has become our custom there are Group Study & Discussion resources for you to use *over the course of the week. As God leads you into the fullness of His word/work in your life he will then introduce you to someone who needs to hear the good news from you. Also... somewhere here today you may feel a nudge - tap - tug. Don't ignore it! That's probably the Holy Spirit prompting you some way. Let's talk about that after worship.*

As we move into this week...Rain drops on roses & whiskers on kittens...Bright copper kettles & warm woolen mittens...Those may/not be **your** favourite things...but we all have them...favourites...favourite slippers, chair, drink, meal, thing to do on a day off... We're more comfortable in certain circumstances, w/ certain people, doing certain things. If I asked you to change seats right now...away from where you've gotten settled & comfortable at least for this morning...yeah...that's a big ask...

Welcome to Peter's world & yours & mine...Where our favourite – comfortable – settled or preferred way can become an obstacle the Spirit must remove so the work of Christ can continue...

Peter was fully at home in the world of Jewish Christians... Jewish disciples...But the gospel is a **surprise** – a promise that breaks boundaries – transcends borders – breaches walls & calls all who are part of it to live sharing its unlimited grace. The good news of Christ is a gift that summons all who have been claimed by it to live outside of the comfortable & settled & into its world-harvesting life-saving mission to the not-yet-won.

"I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism. In every nation he accepts those who fear him & do what is right. This is the message of Good News for the people of Israel—that there is peace with God through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.

Peace with God...Lord. Of. All. And ALL need to hear that good news...whether we're comfortable w/ that & doing that or not.

We'll explore & experience that together. Let's pray...then we'll get stuck into it.

PRAYER OF THE DAY:

Holy Spirit move in & take over our lives. Draw us more deeply into the heart of the Father & the life of the Son. Work through us, your church, so the world can see you in us & come to trust your saving love. Jesus, we pray in your name... Amen

Let's hear the 1st part of God's Word for today...

and then a newish song for us...Come As You Are

FAITH CHAT:

1. Where are you most comfortable in your life? What about **OUTSIDE** your home?

Have you ever been uncomfortable in a circumstance/situation but were surprised by the outcome?

2. Where would you like the Spirit to accomplish something surprising in you?

Philippa...kids...And we'll sing...May We Be One...

4 Pentecost – '21 B – GETTING OUR ACTS TOGETHER: SURPRISING ACTS

We're familiar w/ the ancient prayer of St Augustine: "O Lord, You have made us for yourself, & our hearts are restless until they find rest in you." There is amazing truth there... There *IS* a relentless stirring searching wrestling inside every one of us that points at the eternal separation we experience from God..."sin." "God for ourselves & we're pretty lousy at that job of being God" In any room of people, even this one, there may be some who don't fully get that...who don't believe **their** heart is restless searching longing incomplete separated from the God who wants to live w/ them in love & joy & delight...searching/restlessness doesn't go away in this life Rom 7

Exhibit 1: Cornelius. When we meet Cornelius, he's not a man at rest. How do I know? **In** Caesarea there lived a Roman army officer named Cornelius. He was a captain of the Italian Regiment. He was a devout, God-fearing man, as was everyone in his household. He gave generously to the poor & prayed regularly to God. I want to live next door to him. I have a great neighbour...but C sounds awesome! Well-educated. Well-regarded. Well-advanced in his profession. Generous to a fault. Prays. What more could you ask? But reading ^{b/h} the lines we know C is a restless spiritually hungry man. As a Roman citizen, in a position of great authority/responsibility/power in the Empire, C has given up the religious multi-god-worship of the Empire to devote himself & his household to the God revealed to the Jews. But like the Ethiopian from last week...as a Gentile a non-Jew he'll never be fully inside of the Jewish faith...always outside looking in... But that hasn't stopped him. He continues his religious behaviour in the hopes that somehow he'll be judged "good enough"

C is like most people in the world. Most folks believe everybody lives on somewhere after they die. Most people believe once you die your "soul" or whatever they call the you that's not there anymore; goes somewhere. Some people call it "heaven" & others just "a better place." Some believe your soul comes back for another go...get a do-over. C, also like the vast majority of the people on earth, believes that how you live on this side of the grave determines what happens to you on the other side. He continues his religious behaviour in the hopes that somehow he'll be judged "good enough"...whatever that means...he lives out that restlessness in his heart in the most socially beneficial way possible...but it's still restlessness searching hungering longing that we see. But then...

One afternoon about three o'clock, he had a vision in which he saw an angel of God coming toward him. "Cornelius!" the angel said. Cornelius stared at him in ($\epsilon\mu\phi\omicron\beta\omicron\sigma$) **terror**. "What is it, sir?" he asked the angel. The angel replied, "Your prayers & gifts to the poor have been received by God as an offering! Now send some men to Joppa, & summon a man named Simon Peter. He is staying with Simon, a tanner who lives near the seashore." As

soon as the angel was gone, Cornelius called two of his household servants & a devout soldier, one of his personal attendants. He told them what had happened & sent them off to Joppa. C drops everything to send for Peter...why? Well we don't know exactly until Peter shares this story a chapter later... **11:13-14** - He told us how an angel appeared to him in his home & told him, "Send messengers to Joppa, & summon a man named Simon Peter. He will tell you how you & everyone in your household can be saved!"

1st "terror." $\epsilon\mu\phi\omicron\beta\omicron\sigma$ is the Gk word for emphatically afraid...this isn't the shivers y'all get when Penny the spider is on the ceiling...this is *C needs a clean toga* afraid. You are not afraid like that if you are ok w/ God. C thinks his hour has come & he's not ready...The mortality rate on this earth is still 100% & that bothers C...it bothers all of us. In spite of the fact that most folks think there's something "better" on the other side of death...that does not necessarily lead to peace, rest, contentment... & a desire to go there...C is terrified until the angel speaks...

But 2nd the angel tells him that there *IS* a definite word of salvation that he can hear & receive & it's bigger than just him. This word of salvation is for his household... God has big plans for the Cornelius network. REMEMBER: the gospel is how God in Jesus Christ brings all things all things all things to himself over the objection or interference of sin death & the devil. The gospel is how God comes to us personally to rescue & recreate all things through the life/death/rez of Jesus. C doesn't waste a minute thinking it over. He drops everything & sends 3 trusted helpers to get Peter & invites everyone he can find to get in on this good news that has been dropped in his lap.

And in fact when Peter does show up...C's grateful even if he's not exactly sure what Peter's going to say: **Now** we are all here, waiting before God to hear the message the Lord has given you. But whatever it is it will make all the difference to his restless heart...So Peter starts w/ what he's just learned & then...the gospel (**Sue – put vss 34-43 here**)

God has no favourites – we're all in the same boat – sinners in need of redeeming – prodigals in need of the Father's love/embrace/restoration. "there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus...God has done what the law could never do...Christ crucified/raised declares an end to the law to keeping score & finding fault" Rom 8:1ff

God accepts those who respond in faith...who simply trust that what God in Jesus has done is for them & live from the love they've received. *So the promise is received by faith. It is given as a free gift. – Rom 4:16*

Peace – restoration is through Jesus Christ alone...not the law...not human wisdom or goodness... *Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us...While we were still sinners Christ died for us.* – Rom 5:1 & 8

Power of Christ changes lives even here even now...And that same power that worked through him lives in us...*as the Father sent me so I send you...you will do even greater things...the One who lives in you is greater than the one who lives in the world.*

People killed Jesus but God raised him in triumph over even death. *Praise God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to His great mercy, He has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead – 1 Pt 1:3 He came to his own but they rejected him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of human will, but of God. – Jn 1:12-13* Death has lost its grip on Jesus & on all who trust in him...Death is no longer the greater devourer...destroyer...

Those who believe in him have been **ordered** to share that victory w/ everyone we meet & to reveal his living presence through our lives because he lives in us by his Spirit...*you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. – Acts 1:8*

To believe in him is to be restored to the Father through forgiveness – *I, yes, I alone will blot out your sins for my own sake & will never think of them again. – Is 43:25* - *You were dead because of your sins & because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. He canceled the record of the charges against us & took it away by nailing it to the cross. – Col 2:13-14*

If you were Cornelius the Holy Spirit would bowl you over about now & you'd start preaching your own sermons... It's another Pentecost but this time for Gentiles...so of course the shocked Peter & his companions baptize everyone within splashing distance... And Peter & the church are never the same again...

We all have favourite things...We're all more comfortable in certain circumstances, w/ certain people...doing certain things. Peter was fully at home in the world of Jewish Christians...Jewish disciples...But when our favourite – comfortable – settled or preferred way becomes an obstacle the Spirit must remove it so the work of Christ can continue...

When our comfort – routine – preferred – favourite keeps someone from fully experiencing the saving love of Christ the Spirit must remove it so the work of Christ can continue... God is never bound by what keeps us comfortable. He will keep moving us into the uncomfortable, always for the sake of others.

The gospel is a surprise – a promise that breaks boundaries – transcends borders – breaches walls & calls all who are part of it to live sharing its unlimited grace. The good news of Christ is a gift that summons all who have been claimed by it to live outside of the comfortable & settled & into its world-harvesting life-saving mission to the not-yet-won. **Every** Christian's life is marked by 'windows of opportunity' that demand they take a radical step of faith in order to follow Christ & fulfil His agenda for their life." chip ingram

Take it home...

What would you be willing to do differently in your life so that someone outside faith in Christ could be brought to him?

30 secs... **Go**...I'll pray for us to close...

Lord Jesus...my words & deeds have not always brought you glory or revealed you to the world around me. I have sought more to stand at a distance than to seek the joy of your presence so others might know you. Continue your saving work in me & through me as I extend your gift of forgiveness & restoration. Jesus let your perfect love heal my imperfect love of others...We ask this in your name trusting you to lead to where there's need. Amen.