

Fifth Sunday of Easter
Reformation, Media
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(In first person – as Peter)

Except for Easter Day, this was the gull-darndest, most surprising thing that ever happened to me – and I've had some surprises in my life. But I just wasn't prepared for this. Oh, don't get me wrong, I had plenty of Gentile friends. After all, fishing isn't a profession limited to Jewish people, so there were plenty of Gentiles fishing the same waters I was in, and most of them seemed like pretty regular Joe's – if you know what I mean. Sure, they could be rough and tumble – but then, I'm no saint myself. That would get a good laugh at the docks – St. Peter – right.

Anyway, I was never really prejudiced against them – it's just that, well . . . those gentile's liked to be with their own kind – and that was just fine with us. They could cook anything they liked, go to worship whatever god they wanted, and talk whatever language they liked – in their neighborhood. Hey, that's how a grew up – they had their parts of town and we had ours, and there were just some places I wouldn't go – especially at night.

Could I help it? I was born Jewish – I grew up going to the synagogue and learning God's Word. I even went to Jewish school until I had my bar mitzvah and then had to begin working. But we knew the Torah – and kosher was not just a word in our house – we made sure we followed the law of Moses – and that meant we watched what we ate. If those Gentiles wanted to keep eels and clams – that was up to them – but not me.

So you can imagine my surprise when I get this dream – actually it was like a vision and I see all kinds of reptiles and forbidden animals and birds being lowered toward me on a big sheet – and a voice said, “Peter – get up and kill them and eat them.” And I said, “No way, Lord, I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean and I don’t intend to start now.” And the voice said, “What God has made clean you must not call profane.” I swear it – that’s what it said! I know what you’re thinking – “Sure, Peter, what were you smoking.” But I wasn’t – not drinking any wine either!

But that’s not all of it – just as I came out of this trance – there’s a knock on the door and standing right there is this Roman soldier asking to see me – I just about . . . well let’s just say, I was more than a little surprised! But the voice I kept hearing told me to greet them and go with them. So I go down and asked what they wanted and they told me about their commanding officer, a guy named Cornelius, who wanted to see me. Said an angel had told him to send for me.

Now if I had not just been hearing voices myself, I might have told them where to go – except they were – well soldiers! So I agreed to go with them, but you can bet I was not going to go all alone – so I took some other believers with me to Cornelius’ house. At least it was in a pretty good neighborhood. The soldiers told me he was a pretty good guy and that he was what Jews call a God-fearing man – trying to learn about God. So when I get there, I guess he knew I was sort of a big wig among Jesus’ followers, because he kneels down before me – I said, Geez – get up, I’m no saint – I’m just a guy too.”

So he gets up and tells me how he had been praying when a guy in dazzling clothes appeared to him and told him to send some guys to Joppa to find me and bring me here. I don't know how he could have even known I was in Joppa – and then I thought about the dream I had – about all those animals – and all the pieces of the puzzle began to fall together in my head – God was telling me that stuff I had learned as a kid and believed all my life was not all God's will.

I was really getting confused – I mean this was stuff I had read in the Bible – it could not be more clear – Leviticus 11 tells us that God spoke to Moses and said you don't eat things like camels or rabbits or pigs and you don't eat things from the sea that don't have fins or scales; and you don't eat certain birds, like ostrich and reptiles, like Gecko's or crocodiles – there's a whole list. Repeats it again in Deuteronomy 14. Now, it's like God is saying something else – contradicting that other command.

But here, in front of me was a guy or ate some of that stuff and as I began to talk to him about Jesus and how God's Holy Spirit had been in Jesus and all that God had done through Jesus, Cornelius and everyone in his house began to thank God for Jesus, and for my being there, and I was convinced that God's Holy Spirit was also in them –I know this sounds crazy – AND I know there would be some people who would not believe what I was experiencing – but . . .I could not deny what was happening, God was doing something new.

Truly I perceive . . . truly I perceive . . . that God does not show partiality – that’s when I began to realize that some of the things that Jesus did, that repulsed me – things like touching those lepers, or talking to that Samaritan woman – he was trying to prepare me for this moment. These people, these Gentiles, are more like me than different from me and even though some of the things they do are repulsive to me, things that I thought were forbidden – forbidden by God’s Word – Here I am seeing that God’s Spirit had touched them as much as it had touched me. I had to re-examine my beliefs. God was challenging my traditional beliefs – beliefs that I had grown up with and been taught in religious schools.

I wasn’t sure how I would ever be able to explain this to some of the other leaders of the church in Jerusalem. It was going to change the whole mission of the church. Hmmm – change the whole mission of the church – maybe that’s what God had in mind with that crazy vision he gave me.

Wait a minute! What was it that Jesus told us at the last supper – I give you a new commandment – “that you Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. That’s how people will know that you are MY disciples – if you have love for one another” The Leper? The Samaritan Woman? That crazy Tax Collector Zaccheus? This Gentile Centurion? I don’t know God, this is really challenging me – What did You say again? -- Don’t call people profane or unclean based on your human categories.

(shaking head) What next, Peter, what will God be changing next?