

5th Sunday in Easter
May 19th. 2019
Pastor Matthew Ude

Acts 11:1-18 Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. ² And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, ³ saying, "You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!" ⁴ But Peter explained *it* to them in order from the beginning, saying: ⁵ "I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object descending like a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came to me. ⁶ "When I observed it intently and considered, I saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. ⁷ "And I heard a voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.' ⁸ "But I said, 'Not so, Lord! For nothing common or unclean has at any time entered my mouth.' ⁹ "But the voice answered me again from heaven, 'What God has cleansed you must not call common.' ¹⁰ "Now this was done three times, and all were drawn up again into heaven. ¹¹ "At that very moment, three men stood before the house where I was, having been sent to me from Caesarea. ¹² "Then the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. ¹³ "And he told us how he had seen an angel standing in his house, who said to him, 'Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, ¹⁴ 'who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.' ¹⁵ "And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. ¹⁶ "Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' ¹⁷ "If therefore God gave them the same gift as *He gave* us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?" ¹⁸ When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life."

The first missionary to Tibet wrote about his struggle to find someone to help him learn the language. No one would teach him. Finally he found a man who agreed to teach him the language. The missionary went to his first lesson and the man places a piece of meat in front of him. The missionary looks at it and is a little worried. He decides it is better if he doesn't eat it. He politely says no thanks to the Tibetan man. The Tibetan man says nothing but takes the meat and puts it away. The next day the missionary comes again for his lesson and once again the Tibetan offers him the same piece of meat. This time the missionary definitely doesn't want it and immediately says no. Each day the Tibetan offers the missionary the same piece of meat for five days, until the meat is really rotten. On the fifth day the missionary decides he had better eat it, and takes the meat and eats it.

The Tibetan man says, "now you have learned your first lesson. Whenever someone offers you food take and eat it with thanks."

Food can be a tricky thing, you don't want to offend anyone but there are also certain things you really don't want to eat, like a piece of rotten meat that is five days old.

Peter reminds us in our text today that we should not despise, that is look down upon anything that God has called clean. This is especially so because we will see how God has gone to great lengths to make these things pure and clean. And how ungrateful and sinful it is for us to call unclean anything that God has taken the time to sanctify.

This pertains first of all to food and drink and festivals and holy days. In other words here we have the reason why we don't have to worship on Saturday and we can eat Bacon and Lobster.

Peter of course had a very good reason why he should not eat all those animals on that sheet. He was taught from little on that it was contrary to the will of God that any Israelite should eat such things. You remember that Daniel along with Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego, even when threatened with death, would not eat the unclean meat of Babylon. The Lord showed His approval of that decision by blessing those four.

This list of things to eat and not eat however was never about the food. It was always about the people.

In Matthew 21:33 Jesus says that God "set a hedge around His people." This is a picture that is used many times in the New Testament and in the Old. God set a hedge around His people to keep them safe and separate from all the nations around them.

That first year we were here we had a really big problem with the deer eating our strawberries because we didn't have a fence around our garden. Just so God wanted a hedge around His people to keep them separate from the other people

Imagine if growing up in Wisconsin you never ate pizza. People would notice. People would ask you about it. It would at the same time make you different and also give you a chance to witness.

With the resurrection and ascension of Christ this distinction is now to be down away with. The word of God is not supposed to remain protected within Israel anymore, the people are not supposed to remain separate. The fence is removed. The Jews now are supposed to go out and mingle with and become a part of all the people around them.

And so God sends this vision to Peter to teach him this. But of course the important thing isn't that now Peter can eat bacon and lobster. The important thing is the people, that now the Gentiles also receive salvation and forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus Christ. They are no longer to be kept separate.

Therefore what God has cleansed we do not despise. Therefore we eat whatever seems best to us, but more importantly we do not withhold the gospel of Jesus Christ from any person.

Unfortunately it is not just Peter who needs some convincing. Many in the church are not so quick to “give up the old ways.”

A couple weeks ago we saw that really amazing description of the church in Jerusalem and we asked the question, “how can we be like that church.” Wouldn’t it be great if we were that loving, that dedicate, that joyful, etc. Today we see a much different picture of the church in Jerusalem. One that is probably much more similar to our own church.

They are very reluctant and suspicious of “new things.” They are very quick to judge others before they really know what is going on. They think they know what is going on. But they don’t. They don’t know about the visions , but they quickly jump to judgment.

And yet they received the Holy Spirit and these gentiles also received the Holy Spirit. On Pentecost the speaking in tongues was given so that the apostles could speak about Christ in the languages of the people. But as the Gospel goes out into the world the same gift was then often given in order to prove to the apostles and the Jewish Christian that yes these gentiles were also part of the church. As Peter says they received the same gift.

Despite their sin the church at Jerusalem was the church of God. Despite their sin the Gentiles were now part of the church of God. Jesus had washed them too in his blood how could Peter or the Jewish Christians call them unclean.

We also despite our sin have been washed by Christ. How can any call us unclean, or say that we are not the church of God?

What do we confess every Sunday? I believe in one holy Christian church. Where is this Holy Church? Our church sure doesn’t look like it, yet we have the promise of God.

1 Corinthians 6:11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

A church is not a church because it looks holy on the outside. A church is holy because Christ says it is. And if he has washed our neighbor in His own blood and called him a saint and a son of God, who are we to despise that or look down on it? And if he has washed me in His own blood and called me, whom am I or anyone else to contradict that. The promises of God remains sure and certain, what God has called holy we cannot disdain.

1 John 3:20 For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.

Amen