

Sermon #85
September 8 2019
Acts 10:23b-28;34-43
“The Power of the Gospel”

The next day he got up and went with them, together with some of the believers from Joppa.
²⁴ They arrived in Caesarea the following day. Anticipating their arrival, Cornelius had gathered his relatives and close friends. ²⁵ As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in order to honor him. ²⁶ But Peter lifted him up, saying, “Get up! Like you, I’m just a human.” ²⁷ As they continued to talk, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. ²⁸ He said to them, “You all realize that it is forbidden for a Jew to associate or visit with outsiders. However, God has shown me that I should never call a person impure or unclean. ²⁹ For this reason, when you sent for me, I came without objection. I want to know, then, why you sent for me.”
³⁴ Peter said, “I really am learning that God doesn’t show partiality to one group of people over another. ³⁵ Rather, in every nation, whoever worships him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶ This is the message of peace he sent to the Israelites by proclaiming the good news through Jesus Christ: He is Lord of all! ³⁷ You know what happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism John preached. ³⁸ You know about Jesus of Nazareth, whom God anointed with the Holy Spirit and endowed with power. Jesus traveled around doing good and healing everyone oppressed by the devil because God was with him. ³⁹ We are witnesses of everything he did, both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, ⁴⁰ but God raised him up on the third day and allowed him to be seen, ⁴¹ not by everyone but by us. We are witnesses whom God chose beforehand, who ate and drank with him after God raised him from the dead. ⁴² He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”
⁴⁴ While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell on everyone who heard the word. ⁴⁵ The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. ⁴⁶ They heard them speaking in other languages and praising God. Peter asked, ⁴⁷ “These people have received the Holy Spirit just as we have. Surely no one can stop them from being baptized with water, can they?” ⁴⁸ He directed that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited Peter to stay for several days.

Last Sunday I promised to finish my story of the garbage cans. So what did it take to exchange our old can that belonged to the previous company that do not pick up garbage anymore? Six weeks of persistence and talking to the right people. At first the answer was “absolutely not.” The last time I called Republic Service I was connected with a different manager. “Absolutely Not” became: “Yes, of course you are our customers. Yes, I understand it is our purpose to serve well. I hear what you are saying. I will open a case and I think we will be able to solve the problem”.

Peter last Sunday said: “Absolutely Not!” He saw the craziest vision of unclean animals and was told to kill and eat them. Peter replied, “Absolutely not”, because he knew God’s law. He knew what is right. He would never defile himself. Three times he

heard a voice: "What God has made clean you must not regard as unclean". The vision of unclean animals was not really about food. God was preparing Peter for accepting the unacceptable.

Our old trash became acceptable, even though at first it was pronounced unacceptable.

Peter was perplexed. While he was reflecting on the meaning of this vision the three Gentile messengers from Cornelius arrived calling for him. Should he hide on the roof top and remain unseen?

The Spirit told Peter, "Three men are looking for you. Arise, go downstairs and accompany them without misgivings. I have sent them myself."



Like Abraham under the Oaks of Mamre, Peter fed the three strangers and offered lodging. The prophets and even Jesus had taught about welcoming the stranger.

The next day Peter and seven other Jewish believers went to Caesarea to meet Cornelius, his close friends and his relatives. Cornelius is filled with expectation. How excited am I to hear God's word? Do I bring my friends and relatives in anticipation of encountering the living Christ? Is my heart filled with assurance that God's Spirit is alive and I will hear the words of life for me? God is at work.

Cornelius does not know what God is exactly going to do but he is ready. He knows something big is about to happen. It reminds me of the saying. If you pray for rain, you better take your umbrella even if there is not a sign of rain in the sky.

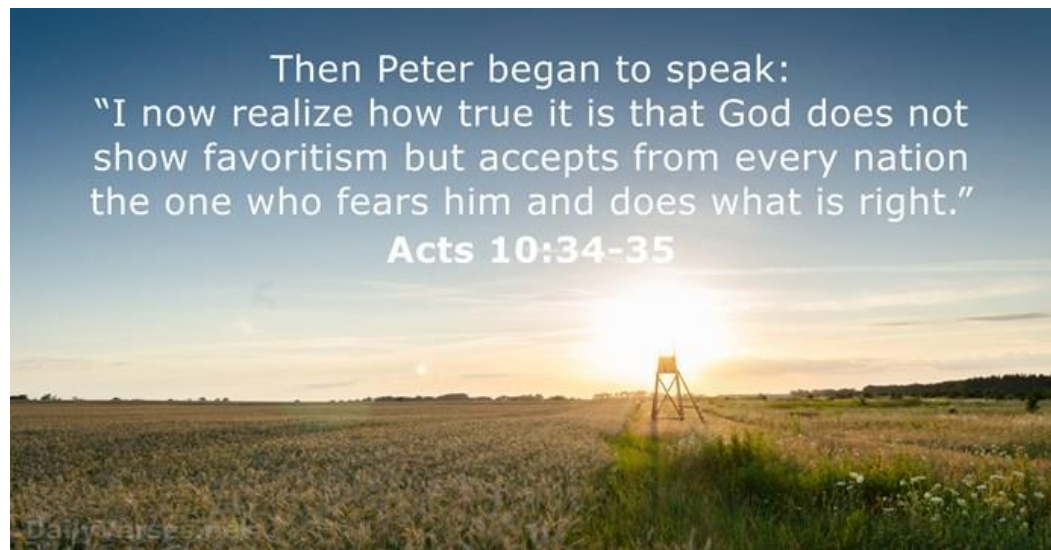
This Centurion of Roman soldiers invites others to be part of something about to happen. Cornelius filled his house with people. What a trust! Wouldn't you first want to see yourself before inviting others? What if it is not worth it? What if this guy Peter will not come or won't be that good? What will all these people think about me? I bet Cornelius did not have any of these thoughts. I bet his prayers, his time with God, taught him to trust God.

When Peter entered **"Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in order to honor and worship him."** On one hand Peter wants to totally reject Cornelius for being a Gentile. On the other hand Cornelius wants to treat Peter like a god. Sometimes it is not easy to love God and to love others at the same time. Sometimes we replace God with adoration of individuals.

Peter tells Cornelius to get up, because they both are just humans.

Peter, says, "You know I shouldn't be here. It is a taboo for me to talk and be at the house of Gentile." God stretches his people. God cares about our growth, about our willingness to go out of our comfort zone and convenience. God calls us to forgive, to apologize, to accept, to serve the unlovable.

On September 15th ??? we as the New Life community of believers will serve a meal to people who come to get food from Gleaners. I desire that in one way or another we all can be part of this ministry. It is one of many ways we will meet people, we will see their faces, we will learn about their lives and give witness to the love of Christ. I am convinced this is what it means to be a church and to be a Christian.



³⁴ Peter said, "I really am learning that God doesn't show partiality to one group of people over another. ³⁵ Rather, in every nation, whoever worships him and does what

is right is acceptable to Him.” This is totally revolutionary. Gentiles, people from a different culture, are becoming part of God’s people without first becoming Jews.

When the missionaries from USA came back to Lithuania, to reopen Methodism they faced many challenging situations. I think I appreciate them even more now since I find myself living and serving in a different culture than I grew up in.

One of the hardest things is to understand differences between cultures. We must not confuse faith and culture. You want to bring the gospel yet you do not want to lose your own culture.

Many of you are familiar with Heifer Project International. A cow is donated to a family. When the cow has calves you give them to your neighbor. It sounds wonderful here in America. Let me tell you it did not work in Lithuania. Even in Russia it will not work.

If a preacher stands to preach and has his hands in his pockets Lithuanians regard it as a sign of disrespect and dishonesty. Never ever put your hands in your pocket while talking to a police officer.

In Africa it is an insult to give with your left hand.

It is good to know, respect and accept cultural differences. The diet of other cultures is not disgusting. It is different. Lithuanians are very sensitive if you do not eat what they serve. It is our way to share love and hospitality. Frequently they will buy groceries they cannot afford for the guest.

Recently I realized that I am what you might call forthright. As a Lithuanian, especially a Lithuanian woman, I will call a spade, “A spade.” I am direct. I do not take time to consider how to say what I think or how to address the issue I want to address. Instead, I simply get to the point and call it what it is and let you know what I think.

In my home, if I see somebody is lazy, I say so. If I see somebody didn’t dress appropriately I make my thoughts known. My way of communicating can be received as rude and hurtful. It is not my intention. I realize how very polite you are here. You communicate very differently. When I call on the phone I do not talk half an hour about the weather. I tell you in the second sentence why I am calling. Here I have to read between lines and think about what I hear and interpret what you are saying and what you truly mean. I am working on my communication.

Cornelius loved God. Cornelius prayed constantly. Cornelius was generous. Cornelius was a man honored even in a different culture. Verse 22 says he was well-respected by all the Jewish people.

All of these good things and prestige were not enough to be saved. Far too often we do many good things but we never tell anyone about Jesus. We show love and we

show generosity and all of this is good, but what saves us? Who brings us salvation from our sins and death that results from sin?

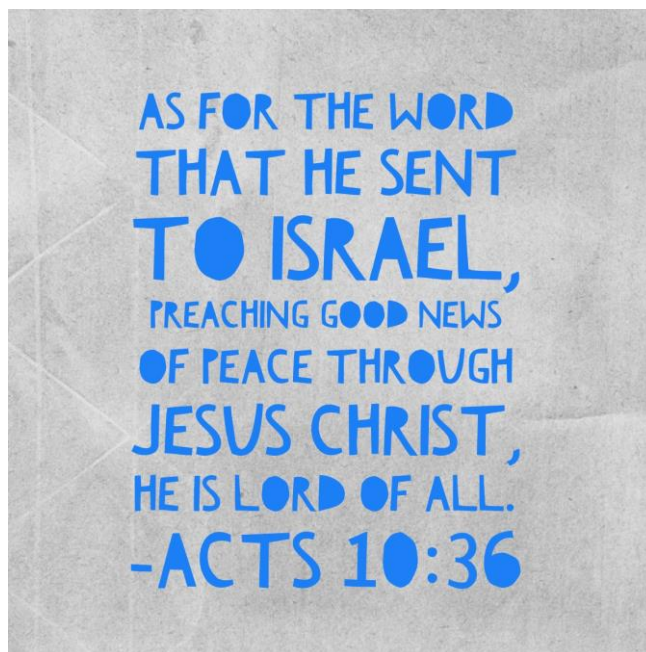
I understand we frequently do not know what to say. Peter helps us out. He lets everyone in the room know that God's grace is for everyone. There are no favorites. Regardless of culture or nationality whoever fears God and does what is right is welcome to the table.

He preaches a short 6 point sermon.

1. **Jesus the Messiah is Lord of all**
2. **Jesus healed and liberated**
3. **Jesus was crucified.**
4. **Jesus was raised to reign forever**
5. **Jesus will judge the living and the dead**
6. **Go and share what you heard**

The result of all this is forgiveness of sins and a new relationship with God. Sin interrupts our relationship, but through Jesus friendship with God is restored.

This message has power in itself. I always have to remind myself, when I preach or talk to someone on the street, I do not have to make the gospel powerful. It is powerful in itself. I do not have to worry about how to make it appealing and attractive. The message is: Jesus Christ is Lord of all.



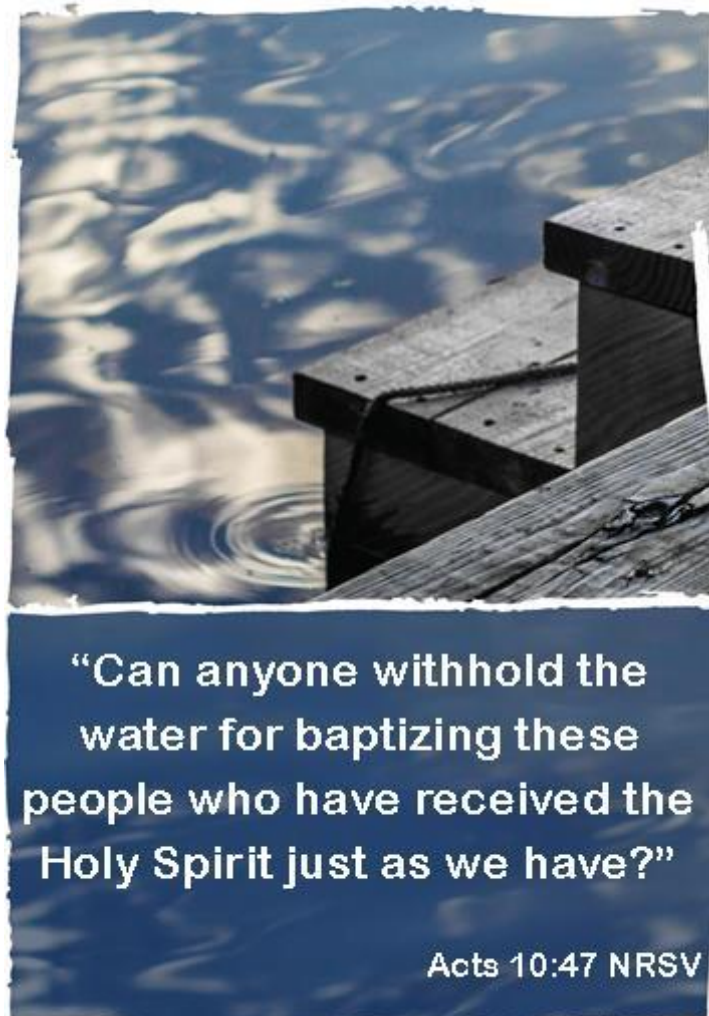
You do not have to make them believe. It is not your job. Your job is to act your faith. The Holy Spirit is always with us when we let others know about Christ Jesus.

“While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell on everyone who heard the word”. While Peter was still talking! They did not have to say “AMEN.” They did not have to say “I believe.”

The Holy Spirit couldn't wait for Peter to finish. There was no altar call. In their hearts and in their minds they received. I love the image of the Father waiting for all of us to come to Him. I love the image of the Father seeking the one who is lost. I love the image of the Holy Spirit waiting for one heart to go from “absolutely not” to “yes.” The Holy Spirit is eager to come and empower everybody who is willing to give their lives to the lordship of Jesus Christ and to have new life.

The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles.

Jewish believers, who came with Peter, couldn't believe what they were seeing. They remembered very clearly what happened to them at Pentecost in Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit came like tongues of fire and they proclaimed the gospel in different



languages. Now, these Gentiles start to speak in tongues praising God. I think the Holy Spirit gives many gifts, but the most important is new life. One evidence was that they spoke in different languages praising God so there would be no questions for Peter and those who came with him. God proved that exactly the same Spirit they received in Jerusalem is given now to Gentiles.

God does not play favorites among people. God has concern for all humanity and welcomes all peoples. He welcomes and invites us to turn from our sins. He calls us to believe the good news and to live it. When God met Cornelius, he met him not so he could stay where he was, but so he would hear, accept and live a life as Jesus' follower. God comes in the vision for Peter, so he can get out of his own understanding and will receive God's understanding. God's leads him to share the gospel to the person whom he previously would not even talk to. Our Lord and loving God is with us where we are so we can be where He wants us to be.

Let's come to the Communion Table as we are. May these words: "Jesus is the Lord of all" bring life in you. Hear the gospel, the good news: Jesus died for you, he rose from the dead and he lives forever. He is your Savior. He lives and wants to give you abundant life filled with joy.