

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin
May 6, 2018

WELCOME TO THE FAMILY

1. **Lord, Help Me to Know Your Heart!**
2. **Lord, Give Me Your Heart!**

Acts 10 - 11

Few things in life are worse than being on the outside looking in.

Some of us here today **hated recess**. We were always chosen last for kickball and softball and basketball. Those of us who always *did* the picking never really got how hard it was for the rest of us. Self-focus can be like that.

Some of us **hated high school**. You couldn't pay us to go back and relive that time! Kind of like recess, some of us weren't cool enough to avoid being the object of sarcasm and bullying. Those of us who *were* cool enough for the cliques didn't quite get how hard it was for the rest of us.

Some of us look back at our **childhood with sadness**. Our family was not as loving as yours. *Your* mom and dad were glad to see you come in the door. Your mom made supper while you and dad played catch. Your mom and dad were happier to see **ME** than my own parents were! "Welcome to the Family!" your parents once said.

I am not sure you get how tough it is to be on the outside looking in!

I. **Lord, Help Me to Know Your Heart!**

A. **God Made Us for Relationships...for Community**

Cornelius was a man on the outside looking in. He was a Gentile—a strange word to us for a **"non-Jewish person"**. **NO** blood of Abraham in his veins. **NO** welcome in the inner courts of the temple. **NO** welcome in a Jewish home for sheepshead and a beer. Cornelius knew that for most Jews he was not welcome, but apparently some of the Jews knew God's heart and they had shared it with Cornelius!

Cornelius believed that Adam was Abraham's father AND his! Cornelius knew that God had created us for relationships, even *speaking* to create this world so that we would **know his heart!** Cornelius knew that God had created Adam physically for a relationship with his wife and to father children with Eve so that family and community would be born! Cornelius believed that unlike the Roman pantheon of false gods, the true God intends his creatures to be a family, *his* family, to walk and to talk with him—their best friend—just like in the original garden in the cool of the day!

Cornelius believed that the God of Israel was SO intent on community WITH us that he actually wrote down his words in a book and gave that book to the Jewish people to share with the world! God actually cares about people—ALL people!

Had Cornelius actually heard God's heart in the book of Isaiah speaking in advance to Jesus, the world's Savior from sin?

“It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.”

God IS all about relationships and Cornelius KNEW that God loved him, though to most he was on the outside looking in.

B. God Modeled True Community and Welcomed Us Home!

Cornelius trusted the heart of God that there was room for him in the family--and so he was waiting for HIS Messiah--from the Jews! And then an amazing thing happened!

About three in the afternoon he had a vision. He saw an angel of God, “Cornelius!” “What is it, Lord?” he asked. The angel answered, “Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon, called Peter. He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea.” When the angel had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.

God was welcoming Cornelius into the family and was communicating the same! But God had some work to do. He needed to get *the rest of his family* onto his page!

About noon the following day, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He fell into a trance and saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. Then a voice told him, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.”

“Surely not, Lord! I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.” The voice spoke to him a second time, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.” This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

While Peter was wondering about the meaning, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon’s house was and stopped at the gate asking if Simon Peter was there.

The Spirit said to Peter, “Simon, three men are looking for you. Get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.”

APPLICATION: God is always teaching us, isn’t he? Especially *how to love* for sometimes we can be rather “thick” in our self-centeredness! Sometimes we forget that we are ALL children of Adam, and that we are ALL in need of a Savior from sin, and that we are ALL welcome to the family through faith in Jesus, the world’s Savior.

True story: The old man was in his last days—his face white and drawn. He was one of God’s men, awaiting his Savior. But at a time when he was more alert, his daughter leaned over and whispered in his ear, “Dad, there will be people in heaven who look different than you. Jesus wants you to be nice to them.”

The family of God...communicating...and reminding each other of the heart of our God—a HEART FOR ALL people.

Is there a prejudicial bone in your body? Could some ONE walk into this church and your heart would turn away? **“Peter, kill and eat! Do not treat as unclean what I have made clean.”**

II. Lord, Give Me Your Heart!

A. Sin Divides Community

Sin divides community. It always has and it always will. That was the devil's intent the moment he entered the garden and crouched near the forbidden tree. He hated God's love for mankind and mankind's love for God! So he convinced Adam and Eve that they were smarter than their best friend, that God was lying about sin and that God was being selfish about knowledge and freedom!

So sin happened. A piece of fruit and the world was changed. Mankind was changed! Adam and Eve ran from their friend! They lied to their friend! They turned on each other in the heat of guilt! Their son murdered his brother and shattered the family! The family slowly fell away from God, their friend, thinking him foolish and not worth listening to! Until only eight were left to survive the flood in an ark of cypress wood.

After the flood, sin continues to divide community—dividing people from our best friend when we think we know better than the Creator, and dividing people from each other through greed and envy and arrogance and prejudice. Sin makes “nations” necessary. Sin makes “borders” a reality. Sin makes war and terrorism a fact of life! Sin divides community.

What was God to do? It is NOT in mankind to change the world.

B. God Sent Jesus to Be the Agent of Change

Amazingly, Cornelius GOT that! And he trusted God! My guess is Cornelius had seen enough war and death and hate—enough of a world NOT listening to its Creator—that he believed Israel's Messiah was the only hope to reunite!

Wouldn't it be cool if our gathering today had more diversity? Now, don't get me wrong—suburban Milwaukee is our demographic and that is cool. But for the sake of God's story, if we had MORE diversity in skin color, in wealth, in accents, in heritage—the world would be compelled to ask, “How is it that St. Paul's gets along so well with so much diversity? The rest of us are just seem to fight and to hate.”

And HOW would you answer as you were giving your Chinese sister a hug or teaching your Indian brother to high five? Might you say, “Well, we went to school one day with our Jewish brother, Peter, in the city of Joppa!”

Peter entered the home of Cornelius and found a large gathering of people. “You are well aware it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without objection. May I ask why you sent for me?”

Cornelius answered: “Three days ago I was in my house praying. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me, ‘Cornelius, God has heard your prayer. Send to Joppa for Simon, called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner.’ So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.” (Starving for the community of God!)

Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. You know the message God

sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.”

Did you catch that? Jesus is **the** Agent of Change! Jesus alone can unite a world fractured by sin? How did he do it? How did it happen so that WE, the family of God, are ready to welcome any and all who believe in Jesus and do his will?

APPROPRIATION: Whoa, my friends! Time out! How self-centered of me to imply that everyone ELSE is the diversity and that you and I are “the standard”, the “norm”! Are WE more worthy to be in God’s family than others? God reminds us in his book, ***“ALL have sinned and fall short of the family of God. Your sins have separated you from your God...forever.”***

God doesn’t see us worthy of anything from him—no matter **who** we are and **what** we look and **how** we live. Yet, he calls us “family”! ***“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called the children of God! And that is what we are!”***

What has made the difference? Or better yet, WHO?

Well, even in an earthly family, “family” starts with commitment. It begins with TWO people in the challenge and blessing of marriage. In the family of God, family began with the commitment of ONE. ***“God demonstrates his love for us in this: while we were still sinners—mired in self-centeredness —Christ died for us...the righteous for the unrighteous...to bring us to God.”***

Jesus is the Agent of Change who bought US our ticket into God’s family with his blood! And that is true for ALL in the family of God! The color of my skin, the size of my offering, the language that I speak, the pedigree that I claim—matters not. Sin would keep us ALL on the outside looking in if Jesus had not stepped up, washed us clean in his blood and slapped his Name on us to make us presentable to his Father!

What a joy it will be to stand at the gate of heaven one day with a great and diverse crowd and when asked “why are all of YOU here?”, to smile and say, “Jesus invited us. He said we belonged!”

CONCLUSION After today’s message, I think that when I enter heaven, the new Jerusalem, one of the things I will ask is this, “Can anyone direct me to where Peter and Cornelius are hanging out? I want to thank them for that lesson on family--that community only exists because of Jesus and the forgiveness of sins. That community is rich when it includes the diversity of God’s people! No ‘on the outside looking in’ for anyone who knows Jesus. THAT is one of the coolest things about this family of God!”

In the Name of Jesus, welcome to the family! Amen.

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