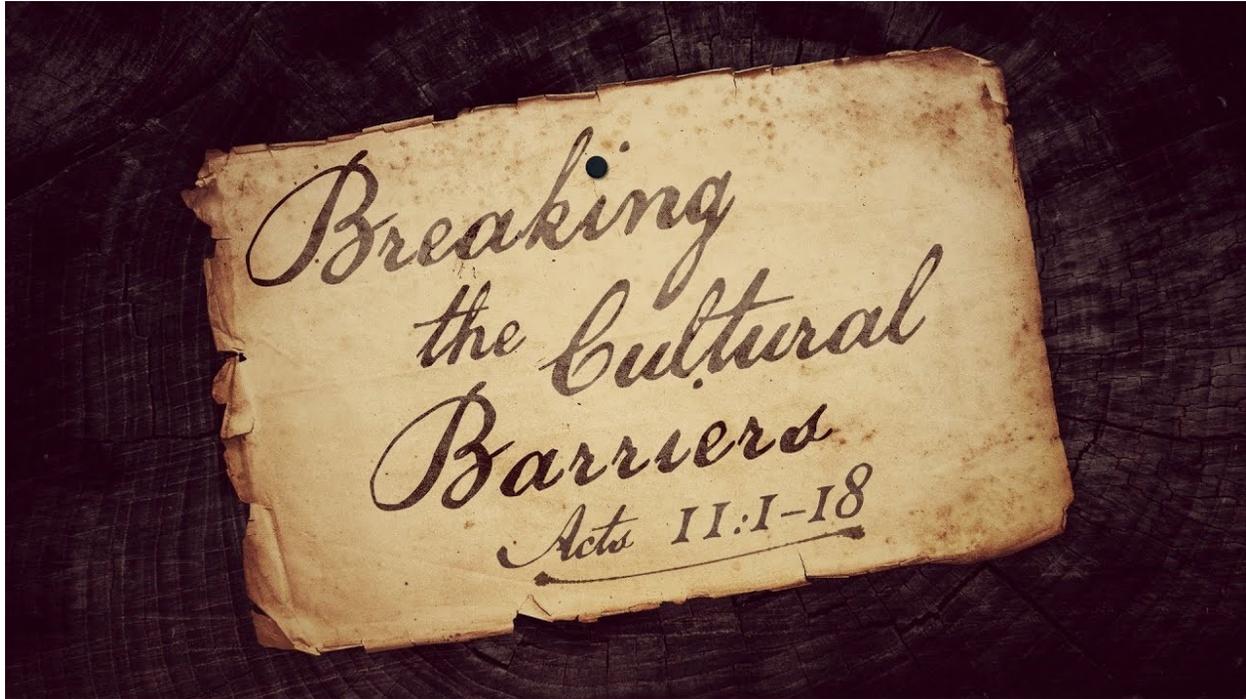


## Worship at Home Guide



**August 2, 2020**

**18<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

This Worship at Home Guide is a supplement to our worship services.

- 8:30 a.m. Zoom based worship service.
- 10:30 a.m. Drive-In Church in the church parking lot.
- 5:30 p.m. Outdoor worship around the fire pit. Lawn chairs suggested. Bring your own dinner.

Join Zoom Meeting (Click link below). You will be prompted to enter the username/password.

[Join our Cloud HD Video Meeting now](#)

Meeting ID: 840 5188 5876

Password: 903205

\* If there are technical difficulties, communication will come via email.

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### Gathering Question/Gathering Music

**Opening Sentences**                      **Psalm 34:3**

O praise the Lord with me, let us exalt God's name together!



And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’

If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God? When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, “Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life.”

### **Questions for Reflection and Discernment**

1. What questions do you have for Luke as the storyteller?
2. For Peter as the one who lives the story?
3. What word or phrase catches your eye/ear in this story?
4. What do you make of this story? What seems plausible? What is challenging?
5. What do you think of Peter’s need to defend himself before the ‘circumcised’?
6. What is a time when you were called up to testify to how and why you believe?

### **Interpretation of Acts 11:1-18**

The gospel is not about the solo efforts of one enlightened and progressive leader who takes it upon himself to baptize gentiles. When Peter returns to Jerusalem, he has some explaining to do to the church. The story of the vision is retold for emphasis. Luke softens the resistance of the church by saying that it was table fellowship with gentiles which angered the saints at Jerusalem, when it probably was baptism—or the problem of circumcision (see Acts 15)—which was the probable root of their anger.

Peter now says that “the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction” (Acts 11:12). The church’s silence and then response shows that it realizes a bold (and perhaps frightening) chapter has opened in the saga of the People of God. To gentiles also God has granted the ability to turn toward life. The real “hero” of the story, the “star” of the drama is not Peter nor Cornelius but the gracious and prodding one who makes bold promises and keeps them, who finds a way even in the midst of human distinctions and partiality between persons.

Gentiles like Cornelius are included, not as those who are basically nice people after all but as those who, like Israel, are able to repent (Acts 11:18). Repentance, contrary to popular misconception, is not a heroic first step I make toward Christ nor is it a feeling-sorry-for my sins. It is the divine gift of being able to be turned toward truth. Turning toward the truth about myself and my situation is quite beyond my power to accomplish. Like Cornelius, I cannot repent—turn around—on my own. So God does it for me. In Christ, God has turned toward us and “granted,” given, us repentance. Cornelius is surprisingly passive in this story, as if he is someone who is being swept along, carried by events and reacting to actions quite beyond his power to initiate or

to control. This is the way it is with repentance. It is more than a decision we make (“since I gave my life to Christ”; “since I took Jesus as my personal Savior”) or some good deed we offer to God.

Repentance is the joyful response to God’s offer of himself to us, the necessary, quite appropriate turn of a life which is the recipient of God’s gracious turning toward us. Repentance is an act of God’s grace. Everyone, says Peter (10:43), Jew or gentile, virtuous pagans like Cornelius or zealous persecutors like Saul, may now turn, return to God.

— from *Acts, A Bible Commentary For Teaching and Preaching*, William H. Willimon

## **Anthem**

### **Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession**

Lord, hear; Lord, forgive; Lord, do.

Hear what we speak not; Forgive what we speak amiss; Remind us what we leave undone;

Equip us so we may work for your glory, and the good of your kingdom.

Hear now our individual and collective prayers of thanksgiving and intercession...

Mighty God, whose Word we trust, whose Spirit equips us to pray, we pray saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

### **The Sacrament of Holy Communion\***

Invitation

Words of Institution

Sharing of the Bread and Cup

Prayer following Communion

\* You are asked to provide your own bread and cup for this celebration.

### **Hymn            God, Be The Love To Search and Keep Me**

**Sharing of the Peace:** Sharing Jesus’ invitation to his disciples:

Peace be with you.

As the Father has sent me, so I send you!

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### **Hymn “As The Wind Song”**

As the wind song through the trees, as the stirring of the breeze;

so it is with the Spirit of God,  
As the heart made strangely warm, as the voice within the storm,  
so it is with the Spirit of God.  
Never seen, ever known where this wind has blown bringing life,  
bring power to the world, as the dancing tongues of fire, as the soul's most deep desire,  
so it with the Spirit of God.  
As the rainbow after rain, as the hope that's born again, so it is with the Spirit of God.  
As the green in the spring, as a kite on a strong, so it is with the Spirit of God,  
making worlds that are new, making peace come true, bringing gifts,  
bringing love to the world, as the rising of the yeast, as the wine at the feat,  
so it is with the Spirit of God.

### **Hymn "Spirit Of The Living God"**

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.  
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.  
Melt me; Mold me; Fill me; Use me;  
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.

### **Hymn "God, Be The Love To Search and Keep Me"**

God, be the love to search and keep me; God be the prayer to move my voice;  
God, be the strength to now uphold me: O Christ, surround me; O Christ, surround me.

Resources from the *Book of Common Worship and Glory to God Hymnal*, PCUSA

### **Meditation on Acts 11:1-18**

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ! Blessings in God's name on this ninth Sunday after Pentecost, or the 18th Sunday in Ordinary Time. We have entered the most extended time in the church year, the time referred to as Ordinary Time, so named not because it is a time of low expectations but because it is a time that does not have a holiday, like Christmas or Easter, or the context of a specifically devoted season, such as Advent or Lent. It is a season of growth and the liturgical color is green. This year as we grow into the new ordinary brought on by Covid-19 and the societal unrest in our land, we are focusing on stories from the Acts of the Apostles, overhearing how the early Church found her voice witnessing to what God was doing in Jesus' name through the Spirit.

Peter has traveled from Joppa, where he was spending time witnessing to Caesarea, after he was asked by Cornelius to come and visit at the urging of God, who had provided both men with visions. Peter had witnessed to Cornelius and those who were gathered in his house (relatives and close friends, we are told) about what God had done in the person of Jesus. The result was the descent of the Holy Spirit on all those who were gathered. As Peter witnessed this, he

announced that it was a sign from God that those who had experienced God's mercy in such a profound way should be baptized. Those assembled were baptized and Peter was invited to stay with the group for several days. There were other witnesses to the experience, in addition to Peter and Cornelius and his guests present: the circumcised believers who had traveled with Peter from Joppa to Caesarea.

They now accompany Peter to Jerusalem as he returns to his home base. The word of the experience in Joppa has already reached the believers in the Jerusalem Church and when Peter returns, he is quizzed by them. "Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?" is their query. Peter retells the story again. He tells of his vision and how he had come to understand that God was no longer making a distinction between Jew and Gentile. He also shares how in the midst of his preaching he experienced the descent of the Holy Spirit upon those who were gathered in the same way that those who were gathered in Jerusalem on Pentecost had experienced the gift of the Holy Spirit. Peter shares with his listeners how the Spirit reminded him of Jesus' words, that "John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." Peter then becomes the questioner, asking those who are quizzing him, "If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?"

We are told that, "When they heard this they were silenced." For how long you imagine? How long did it take for these pious Jews, who were also Jesus' disciples, to hear and absorb what Peter had said in retelling them the story of his experience with the vision from God of the sheet with all the creatures, the corresponding visit to Cornelius by an angel, and the resulting experience in Cornelius' house as Peter preached and the Holy Spirit descended on all (mostly gentiles) who were present? How long do you think?

However long it took, Luke tells us that their response was to praise God, saying, "Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life." In other words, the God of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Rachel and all of the other Jews through the millenniums was now to be understood as the God of the Gentiles as well. God was open (probably always had been) to any person who desired to turn to God, to return to God (the meaning of repent), in honesty and humility, and such a choice would lead to life for them as equally and as fully as it had for the Jews.

Now that you have had a moment to think, I will ask again: how long do you think it took for them to understand what Peter had come to understand? Peter had the vision the persons listening to him had the report. My suspicion is that it took a while. And why wouldn't it? Saul takes time after his 'conversion' experience to digest and discern in Tarsus (three years by his account). Peter has had the days since the vision, the time traveling to visit Cornelius, the experience itself, and then several days of living with the new reality by the time he gets around

to telling his story again. It does take time for new learning to sink in. We live our way into a new way of thinking rather than think our way into a new way of living, at least when we do it most successfully. When has this been true for you? For many of us it has been marriage, or parenting, or some other huge shift from what until what was before was (then) now. And even then, that took time to live into the new reality.

Peter has experienced the invitation from God to live into a new reality. It is not just that he must think differently, he has been invited to live differently. No longer can he use his religion or his place in life to discriminate against another because the other is not Jewish. He has now been invited to broaden his set of friends and associates to include Gentiles, and to freely eat with them as one of the most intimate expressions of social interaction of his day. As the text implies, no longer is circumcision to be the act that divides men (in this case it would be only the men) one from another. “What God has made clean (we) must not call profane.”

Take a moment and allow that to sink in, through your ears, into your head—your mind—and then into your heart—the place where the ancients placed our feelings. God is doing a new thing, Peter says, and he declares that he is on board. What does he have to lose? What does he have to gain? What do you and I have to lose and/or gain by seeking to understand what God is making clean that we might call profane?

What is the longest distance you have traveled physically in your life? What is the longest distance you have traveled emotionally...intellectually...spiritually? In the fifty-six verses of Acts sharing the story of Peter and Cornelius and God and two different communities—one Gentile and one Jewish—there has been a great distance traveled no matter which category you measure the travel by. Cornelius has been affirmed as a pious person, Peter has been portrayed as a faithful child of God, and two communities of faith have had the opportunity to be reminded that it is God—and God’s gift of the Holy Spirit—that is the true test of the presence and presents of God. Thanks be to God! Amen.