

WELCOMING OTHERS IN CHRIST

“Lamonte, man, you’re turning us down to run with that guy?” said his coworker.

“His name is Habib,” replied Lamonte, “He and I already planned to have lunch together.”

Once the two were in Lamonte’s truck, Habib said, “I would have understood if you wanted to go to lunch with your friends.”

“Oh, no. We said we were going out,” said Lamonte. “You are a friend and, most importantly, my Christian brother.”

It was a year earlier when Lamonte learned that Habib was a believer. Habib was from Iran, and his family was in the small minority of those who followed Christ. He and his wife had first come to the US to attend college and later received green cards.

Lamonte was fascinated to hear Habib talk about following the way of Jesus in a majority-Muslim nation. Just listening to Habib felt like rediscovering a courageous faith.

“I have to thank you, Habib,” said Lamonte. “Your heart and graciousness challenges me.”

“Brothers,” Habib said, offering a fist to Lamonte.

“Brothers,” Lamonte agreed, taking one hand off the steering wheel for a fist bump.

1 When have you discovered something surprising about someone you know?

2 What does it say about God that He calls people of all types?

⁹ On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: ¹⁰ And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, ¹¹ And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending upon him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: ¹² Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. ¹³ And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.

¹⁴ But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.

¹⁵ And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.

⁹ About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. ¹⁰ He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. ¹¹ He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. ¹² It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. ¹³ Then a voice told him, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.”

¹⁴ “Surely not, Lord!” Peter replied. “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.”

¹⁵ The voice spoke to him a second time, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.”

A Shocking Command

At the time of Peter’s vision, Cornelius’s trusted messengers were on their way to find him. God had been moved by Cornelius’s generosity to the poor and devout prayers, and God sent him a message about Christ (Acts 10:4–6). Cornelius was to meet Peter, but God needed to prepare Peter for what was about to happen.

Peter is a man of action, with a strong sense of justice. It is Peter who leaps to Jesus’ defense and cuts off the ear of the servant of the high priest when Jesus is being arrested (John 18:10–11). One can easily imagine that the Holy Spirit (ever a gentle and good teacher) knows how difficult it will be for Peter to accept that the gospel is even for his Roman oppressors. To prepare Peter, God sends a vision.

It was noon, and Peter—an itinerant preacher traveling on foot—would be hungry. Two meals a day were normal in first-century Jewish culture, and the noon meal was often the first substantial food

of the day. As a meal is being prepared, Peter goes up on the roof to pray and falls into a trance (v. 10).

He sees heaven opened, with a sheet descending, one filled with animals, reptiles, and birds—several creatures Jews were forbidden to consume according to the Sinai covenant (see Lev. 11:13–30). Then a voice comes from heaven, inviting Peter to eat from these animals (Acts 10:13).

Peter reacts with repulsion. As a devout Jew, he rejects food that is unclean. Eating it would make *him* ceremonially unclean—excluded from sacred spaces, needing to wash himself and his clothes, remaining unclean for a period of time (see Lev. 17:15–16).

But the voice rebukes Peter. The declaration raises the question, *What is it that God has made clean?* Peter—who has studied for years at the feet of a Lord who often used metaphors to describe the kingdom of God—realizes that this vision isn't only about dietary laws. God is talking about people!

1 Is there a group of people that your church community might struggle to include?

2 Why do you think God uses this roundabout way to tell Peter His plan? Wouldn't it have just been easier to come right out and say it?

3 What else do you notice about the phrase, “that God has made clean” (v. 15)?



Peter would be familiar with displays of power from high-ranking Roman military commanders. This cavalry helmet of polished bronze dates to the third century and could have been worn in parades.

Carole Raddato

³⁰ And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, ³¹ And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. ³² Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. ³³ Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God. ³⁴ Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: ³⁵ But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

...

²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

³⁰ Cornelius answered: "Three days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me ³¹ and said, 'Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. ³² Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.' ³³ 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."

³⁴ Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism ³⁵ but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.

...

²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Equality in Jesus

Cornelius's story must have floored Peter. First of all, Peter learns that this was happening at the same time as his vision, which shows God's hand. Secondly, "a man in shining clothes" (v. 30) is a description of angels (compare Luke 24:4; Acts 1:10). It would be shocking that a Gentile would be singled out for a visit from angels who declare, "God has heard your prayer" (v. 31). Cornelius's role as a Roman

centurion could make him responsible for quelling rebellions, upholding Rome's violent control of Judea. Peter must have noticed the irony: a man from the very system that killed Jesus now stood before him saying, "We are all here . . . to listen" (Acts 10:33).

Meanwhile, the Jewish leaders felt threatened and were responding harshly to those who called Jesus the Messiah. Peter had already been arrested and flogged (Acts 4–5), and Stephen had been martyred (Acts 6–7). Some of the Jewish authorities were persecuting the messengers of the new covenant, while here a Roman commander was ready to hear.

Peter accepts this as God's doing. He declares, "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" (Acts 10:34–35). Paul echoes and expands this truth in Galatians, insisting that not only are Gentiles *equal* before God, but in God's sight, there is "neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female" (Gal. 3:28). Ethnicity, class, and gender are not barriers to becoming God's child.

For Peter and Paul, the Spirit is the great equalizer. If the Spirit had come upon Cornelius and his household, then they were already holy—living temples of God. And if every believer is a temple, then no ethnicity, social rank, or gender can give advantage in the kingdom of Jesus.

1 Why do you think God mentions Cornelius's gifts to the poor?

2 What does Cornelius's declaration, "we are all here in the presence of God to listen," signal about him as a person (Acts 10:35)?

The Spirit Leads

Peter's encounter with Cornelius marks a powerful turning point in history. It is not only a story of one group of Gentiles receiving the gospel. It is a revelation of the heart of God, a revelation that God's kingdom includes people from all backgrounds and contexts. For Peter—a devout Jew shaped by cultural memory and prejudice—a vision on the rooftop prepared him to change his assumptions about who is acceptable to God. God was expanding the new covenant to people without regard to whether they were Jews or Gentiles.

God had actually been preparing this moment for generations. From the promise to Abraham, to the words of the prophets, to Jesus' ministry among outsiders, we see evidence of God's intention all along. The same Spirit who came in power upon the Jewish believers at Pentecost was now filling Gentiles—even a Roman centurion, whose rank is a symbol of imperial power.

The fact that Peter could recognize Cornelius as a full member of God's family speaks to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit—not only in Cornelius's life, but also in Peter's. Peter began to see others the way God does, as beloved by God and invited into the family without reservation. This truth is echoed in Paul's bold declaration in Galatians 3:28. The limitless reach of the gospel levels human division. In Christ, our ethnicity, gender, or status does not determine power or significance any more than the size of our bank account or social media following.

The Spirit is still preparing us, forming one new people—beloved and equal in God's eyes. We are all commanded to follow in the footsteps of our Lord, declaring the gospel to our enemies and setting aside worldly evaluations of one another.

1 When has God slowly prepared you for something new?

2 What are some scriptural stories showing God's inclusion?

3 Do you think that equality before God obliterates all distinctions? Why or why not?

The Gospel for All People

The good news of Jesus is available to everyone: those who look and act like us and those who are vastly different. This week, you are invited to a silent reflection before God, and it only requires that you put yourself in a position to see others. While you are in a public area (a park, shopping mall, airport, etc.), allow extra time for people watching. As people pass—various ages, nationalities, and backgrounds—pray these words. Feel free to record any observations as you pray.

The gospel is for you.

Key Text

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

—Galatians 3:28 KJV

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

—Galatians 3:28 NIV

Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

Week of March 23 through March 28

- Mon.** John 18:28–38—A Kingdom Not of This World.
- Tue.** Numbers 6:22–26—The Lord's Peace.
- Wed.** Psalm 46—God Is Exalted Among the Nations.
- Thu.** Amos 9:7–12—God Guides the Destiny of the Nations.
- Fri.** Revelation 21:21–27—Glory and Honor of the Nations.
- Sat.** Isaiah 2:1–5—The Nations Shall Gather to God.

Next Week: Isaiah 2:2–4; Acts 17:26–28

We will talk about Paul's creative strategy of preaching peace. What unique ways to share Jesus have you been privileged to see?