

Acts 11:1-18 (May 15, 2022)

***Acts 11:1-18***

<sup>1</sup>Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God. <sup>2</sup>So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him, <sup>3</sup>saying, “Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?” <sup>4</sup>Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step, saying, <sup>5</sup>“I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. There was something like a large sheet coming down from heaven, being lowered by its four corners; and it came close to me. <sup>6</sup>As I looked at it closely I saw four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air. <sup>7</sup>I also heard a voice saying to me, ‘Get up, Peter; kill and eat.’ <sup>8</sup>But I replied, ‘By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’ <sup>9</sup>But a second time the voice answered from heaven, ‘What God has made clean, you must not call profane.’ <sup>10</sup>This happened three times; then everything was pulled up again to heaven. <sup>11</sup>At that very moment three men, sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were. <sup>12</sup>The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house. <sup>13</sup>He told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, ‘Send to Joppa and bring Simon, who is called Peter; <sup>14</sup>he will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved.’ <sup>15</sup>And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. <sup>16</sup>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.’ <sup>17</sup>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?” <sup>18</sup>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.”

***Historical Context***

Table fellowship is crucial in Judaism, a religious tradition that grew up in a broader Middle Eastern culture where the choice of table sharing was a vital indicator of who was in the clan and who was not. Indeed, it could be said that one of the major reasons that Jesus was murdered by the religious authorities of his own religious tradition was his unsavory choice of table companions; he ate with too many sinners for their tastes, thereby making himself unclean in the eyes of those who determine such things.

***Theme: A Reordering of the World as We Know It***

God clearly has in mind a reordering of the world as Peter knew it. And, just as clearly, God has in mind a reordering of the world as we know it. In the previous chapter, Peter witnesses the gift of the Holy Spirit falling on Gentile believers. Peter, the Jew, has just realized and proclaimed that one of the hallmarks of his Jewish existence has now crumbled before his very eyes. Jews and Christians have been taught that God is precisely a "respector of appearances" and loves our appearance a lot more than the looks of others not like us.

One can hardly overemphasize the radical, earth-shaking claim that Peter's announcement represents. If God's spirit is as available to Gentiles as it has been to Jews, the world is a vastly different place.

Chapter 11 reemphasizes, reenergizes, and refocuses this claim again. Peter here retells "the circumcision party" in Jerusalem and what had happened to him in Joppa and Caesarea; in short, the story of chapter 10. The circumcision party, those Jews who continued to insist that full entrance into the new messianic community of Jesus was confined to those who follow the ancient practices of Judaism, are horrified that Peter has "gone in with people who were uncircumcised and ate with them" (11:3).

In a nutshell, here is the issue of chapter 11: How can meals be holy yet shared with people we have been taught are unclean? And the answer is: The people you have thought to be unclean are not unclean—simple as that. So God says. Peter with his own eyes has witnessed the reality that "God has given repentance to life (or perhaps "conversion that leads to life") even to the Gentiles" (11:18).."

This amazing story should inform our relationships with other religions and with people who are not like us.