

Acts 10—Peter and Cornelius

“The real ‘hero’ of the story, the ‘star’ of the drama is not Peter or 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” (William H. Willimon, *Acts*, Interpretation, 99).

“We must not read this story from the safe vantage point of a majority religion where broad-mindedness and toleration cost the majority nothing, but rather, read the story as it was first heard—from the minority point of view, people for whom a bit of pork or a pinch of incense [to Caesar] or a little intermarriage was a matter of life and death for the community. The dietary laws are not a matter of etiquette or peculiar culinary habits. They are a matter of survival and identity for Jews” (Willimon, *Acts*, 96).

Peter’s willingness to visit the home of Cornelius was a violation of the Torah. Jewish law did not allow him to be the guest of a Gentile. He had to sense that something really big was going on here, for at risk in this visit was all he as a faithful believer had previously held sacred.

“A vision of the Lordship of Christ, ruling with the Creator of heaven and earth, is the basis for Christian efforts at inclusiveness. One cannot have a Lord who is Lord only of part of creation” (Willimon, *Acts*, 98).

The Holy Spirit pushes us to think in new ways. Is the Holy Spirit pushing us to think about people in new ways?

The church still wrestles with inclusiveness. Who are the Gentiles of today?

“The story of Cornelius, which ends with Peter’s speech to the assembly at Jerusalem, is the longest narrative in Acts, a seven act drama in sixty-six verses. Judged solely on the basis of the amount of space Luke gives to the story, we know that we are dealing with a crucial concern of Acts, a pivot for the entire book, a turning point in the long drama of redemption” (Willimon, *Acts*, 95).

Peter’s subsequent witness to the “Gentile Pentecost” will both complete the task God has given him and revolutionize how he thinks of Gentile admission into the covenant community.

From this moment forward whenever Peter is asked to interpret the status of uncircumcised Gentiles within the church or in relationship to Jews/Jerusalem, his final appeal will not be to his vision—but to Cornelius’s reception of the Holy Spirit.

Peter is witness not only to the historical Jesus (and so his apostle) but also to the initial outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and its subsequent outpourings in Samaria and now upon the household of Cornelius, an uncircumcised Roman Gentile.

Repentant Gentiles share the same gift of the Holy Spirit equally with repentant Jews.

The conclusion the Peter of Acts draws from their common religious experience is that uncircumcised believers belong as fully to the messianic community as to the stunned circumcised believers.

In Genesis 12 God makes a new initiative. God says that God calls Abram and Sarai “in order to bring blessing to all the nations of the earth.” God begins to work by means of a specific culture of the world, to bring blessing to all cultures of the world. It is God’s decision to take responsibility to bring Creation and all nations of the earth to the originally intended blessing.

Fulfilling God’s promise to Abraham—

Galatians 3:8 “And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you.””

Galatians 3:13-14 “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”— in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”