



Aldersgate
United Methodist Church
St. Louis Park, MN

DEVOTIONS FOR LIFE

Aldersgate United Methodist Church - St. Louis Park, MN

Sunday, April 23, 2023

Scripture: Acts 10:1-17, 34-38

Memory Verse ~ Acts 10:34: ... *"I truly understand that God shows no partiality..."*

Context: This week we leave the Book of Matthew and jump into the Book of Acts for just two weeks. First, a word about the Book of Acts: The Book of Acts is attributed to Luke, and some even refer to it as Luke 2, or 2nd Luke. It picks up exactly where Luke leaves off. Its actual title in many Bibles is "The Acts of the Apostles", but I like to think of it more as "The Acts of the Holy Spirit Through the Apostles". In this way it becomes the story of the Holy Spirit which Jesus promises, the Gospel of The Spirit, if you will.

Another important thing to note about Acts is where it is placed in the bigger story. There is a way in which there are three primary eras in the work of God in the Biblical narrative, which line up with the Trinity. There is the God the Father/Creator era, which is the Torah and the rest of the Hebrew Bible. Here the presence of God is primarily (but not exclusively) manifested in the Torah. God is a great big, distant God, who occasionally draws close in varying kinds of incarnations and messiahs, but is also always as close the words of the Torah, which are as close as our very lips; as the Psalmist says "How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (Psalm 119:103).

The big shift in the New Testament is that it's the 2nd era of God, the "Son" era, wherein God is fully manifested and incarnated in a human being, Jesus of Nazareth. He is the "Word of God" in the flesh and dwelling among us (John 1). And then the next big era is the era of the Holy Spirit. This era is only narrated in any way in the Book of Acts, but is also drawn upon through various letters and other writings in the New Testament, such as Paul's letters and others. Why this is important is that it is essentially the era we are in today. It is the Holy Spirit that is God's presence in our lives today, just as it was for Peter and Mary and Paul and Lydia and Barnabas and Tabitha , etc.

All of that is to say, this is why the first thing that happens in Acts is the Holy Spirit spirit showing up and empowering the disciples to go and do the work Jesus commanded them to be about. And they do. As we get up to today's chapter, this movement is growing like wildfire, but it is as of yet, still very much a movement within Judaism. While the disciples are preaching about Jesus and beginning to commune together in homes (the beginnings of the Christian Church), they are still Torah observant Jews who go to temple and follow the Torah.

But then chapter 10 happens. Our prescribed reading is Acts 10:1-17, 34-38, but it is worth our while. to read the entire story, which is all of Acts 10 (10:1-48). As you read, pay attention to

various identities and what they signify. Who is interacting with whom and where? Who is unsure and what are they unsure about? How does it all come together?

Questions for Personal Devotion & Small Groups:

1. What is Cornelius' identity as described in the story? What is significant about this?
2. What is Peter's identity and what is significant about it?
3. Why does Peter respond to his vision and command from God to "kill and eat" with, "by no means?"
4. Why do you think Peter's vision happened three times?
5. What does Peter mean when he says "I truly understand that God shows no partiality?"
6. How might "in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" be significant or even a radical statement?
7. What do you think this story is telling us today?
8. What do we deem as "unclean" or "unworthy" or as "outside"? How might this challenge those notions?
9. Read verses 10:44-48. This is how the story ends. What is significant about Cornelius being baptized? Why did Peter do it? Why do you think the writer specifically mentions the "circumcised members"?

Prayer for Personal Devotion & Small Groups: Living God, we are part of a bigger world than we know. A world not confined by borders or boundaries, check points or immigration zones, customs officers and armed Guards. For you came amongst us and broke down the walls of hostility. You overturned our cultural norms and set aside our food laws, so that there was nothing that could separate us from you or from each other.

You, O God, are an impartial God: a God who knows no favourites, a God who does not distinguish between race and colour, a God not limited by creed or denomination, a God not blinkered by prejudice, a God not stuck in one time zone, a God not defined by nationhood, for you are God of us all. You are a loving father, a protective mother, a power source of ideas, a liberating influence upon us, a healer of brokenness, a God who accepts us as we are.

When we are puzzled or perplexed, open our minds and hearts to see a way ahead.

When we are confounded by people who seem intransigent, open our eyes to see where they are coming from. When we are mired by doubts and uncertainties fill our hearts with faith and hope so we may bring you glory and honour and praise, through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

