

A Change in Mindset

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Our text is from the first reading. **And they glorified God, saying, “Then to the Gentiles *also* God has granted repentance that leads to life.”** Here ends our text.

Years ago, my mother used to have a mindset that hand washed dishes were best. A dishwasher would use up too much water, too much energy. The dishes wouldn't be as clean. But then my father installed a dishwasher, and mom had a revelation. She tried it and had a change in mindset. Every now and then you've probably had a revelation. A light bulb goes on. You understood a thing one way. But then suddenly you're illuminated. You understand this thing differently now. You have a change in mindset.

This was the case for Simon Peter. Jesus had told him, “Feed my sheep.” And this is what Peter was doing. He was preaching the Gospel to the Jews in Judea. But before Jesus ascended into heaven, he commanded his apostles to make disciples of *all* nations. The Greek word for “nations” here is *ethnos*. It means Gentiles but from it we also get our word *ethnic* and *ethnicity*. The apostles were to make disciples of all ethnicities. How were the apostles to make disciples? By baptizing and teaching. Jesus said, “Go into *all* the world and preach the good news to *all* creation. You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” But it had been some five to ten years since Jesus had said this. Peter was still in Judea preaching the Gospel to just the Jews. So the Lord sent him a revelation to change his mindset.

Peter was on the roof of a house in Joppa along the Mediterranean Sea. He was in prayer when the Lord sent him a vision. Peter saw something like a great sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners. In the sheet he saw all kinds of animals, predatory beasts and reptiles and birds. The Lord said to him, “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” But Peter had a problem with this. There were some unclean animals in the mix, food that wasn't kosher. Peter said, “By no means, Lord; for nothing unclean has ever entered my mouth.”

Now why did Peter have this objection? Well, he was really just following the Old Testament dietary laws that God had given his people in Leviticus. God had commanded the Jews that they were only to eat those animals which he had designated as clean. Those he designated as unclean they were not to eat. God said, “You must therefore make a distinction between clean and unclean animals . . . Do not defile yourselves by any animal . . . which I have *set apart* as unclean for you.” The Jews could eat sheep and goats and cows but they couldn't eat pigs. They could eat chickens but not vultures. They could eat bass but not catfish. Now what was God's reasoning for this command? It *may* have served an actual health reason. Eating animals at the bottom of the food chain which grazed and ate grain is probably healthier than eating animals that ate slop, or carrion, or were lake bottom feeders. Beef *may* be healthier than pork. But these foods weren't inherently clean or unclean. Jesus said, “It's not the food that goes into a man's mouth that makes him unclean, but the sinful thoughts, words, and actions that come out of his heart, mind, and mouth that make him unclean.”

But God had a spiritual reason for declaring food clean or unclean. God said, “You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have *set you apart* from the nations to be my own.” The clean and unclean food was like an object lesson. As God set apart clean food from unclean food, he had also set apart the Jews from the other nations. They were to be holy and clean in their belief, worship, and life. They were not to be unholy and unclean in belief, worship, and life like the pagan nations around them. God called them to be separate, distinct from those nations who practiced false religions. The Jews weren't to defile themselves in idolatry. God gave them other commands that served as object lessons as well to show this separation between themselves and the other nations referred to as Gentiles. “Do not mate different kinds of animals. Do not plant your field with two kinds of seed. Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of material. Do not plow with an ox and donkey yoked together.” Keep these things separate.

But besides being an object lesson, these dietary laws also served a practical way to keep Jewish and Gentile ways separate. If the Jews couldn't eat certain foods, they wouldn't eat with Gentiles who did. If they didn't share table fellowship, they wouldn't be as likely to get caught up in pagan culture and religion. The dietary laws served as a protective hedge to keep paganism out. But they were never intended to keep Gentiles out. Gentiles who heard the Gospel like Rahab, and Ruth, and the Gibeonites came through the hedge and into the Church. The dietary laws were never meant to keep the Gospel in. Peter had the mindset that there were clean people and unclean people, Jews and Gentiles, and never should they mix.

But the Lord said to Peter, “What God has made clean, do not call unclean.” God could make certain foods clean or unclean by his decree. He could also make people clean by his decree that their sins were forgiven. God could make unclean people, both Jews and Gentiles, clean by the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ. At that very

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moment three Gentiles knocked on the door asking for Peter. The Holy Spirit told Peter to go with these men, making no distinction. Peter had a revelation. A light bulb went on. He shouldn't call any man unclean whom God could make clean. Peter had a change of mindset.

So Peter invited the three Gentiles in as his guests. Then, as they requested, he went with them to Caesarea, to the home of Cornelius, a Roman Centurion. Cornelius was a God fearing man who followed the Jewish religion, but he was still an uncircumcised Gentile. One day when Cornelius was in prayer, an angel appeared to him and told him to send men to Joppa to bring back Peter. Cornelius had gathered his entire household to wait for Peter's arrival and hear his message. It's interesting that God didn't speak the Gospel message to Cornelius himself in a vision or have the angel speak it. That certainly would have been more fantastic. But God had Peter proclaim it. When Peter arrived, he made a brief introduction and then began to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He had just gotten to the point where he said, "Whoever believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of sins," when he was interrupted. His sermon was cut short. The people began to speak in other languages. The Holy Spirit was working faith in these Gentiles through the Word of the Gospel and manifesting himself with this gift of speaking in tongues. And so if I'm ever running a little long, instead of yawning or looking at your watches, you might try speaking in tongues. Then I'll know the Spirit has done his work, and I can stop. But when Peter saw this same gift of the Holy Spirit which they received on Pentecost, he said, "Who am I that I can stand in God's Way." He ordered that they be baptized and stayed with them several days, teaching them. Peter's mindset was definitely changed. He was making disciples of *all* nations, of all ethnicities, by baptizing and teaching.

But later when Peter went up to Jerusalem, he was put on the hot seat. Some Jews of the circumcision group criticized him, "You went into the home of Gentiles and ate with them." You see, they were of the mindset that to become a Christian, you first had to become a Jew. To be saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ, you also had to be circumcised and follow the dietary laws and restrictions of the Jewish ceremonial law. But when Peter told them his story of his vision from God and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on these Gentiles, they had a revelation. A light bulb went on. They now understood. They glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles *also* God has granted repentance that leads to life." They had a change of mindset.

Now over a 175 years ago, there were some Lutherans who immigrated to this area from Germany. Lutheran missionaries sent out from our Ft. Wayne seminary came here and started churches in Evansville, first Trinity in town and then Trinity Darmstadt. How did they do mission work? They gathered all the German speaking Lutherans they could find. The members here shared a common faith but also a common culture or ethnicity.

In many ways we were kind of separate from the other Gentile or ethnic masses who spoke English and had their own customs. And this is how many Lutheran churches in America got their start. We need a place for us German Lutherans or Norwegian Lutherans or Slovakian Lutherans to worship. We'll build a church just for us Lutherans of a particular ethnicity. That was the mindset. And people came into the Lutheran church by birth, by having more kids.

But God says, "Don't think so small. Remember what I said. Think about the world, all people. Think about all the many people who haven't heard the Gospel, who don't know. Change your mindset." And God isn't going to speak to these people in visions or send angels to tell them. He says, "*You* will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth." Even to the end of Indiana and the beginning of Kentucky.

But God never tells us to change our Christian beliefs or worship or holy life to bring others into the Church. He says make disciples by baptizing and teaching my Word. We're to remain separate and distinct from the pagan ways of the world. Even after Peter's change of mindset and the Judaizers' change of mindset in the early church, the apostle Paul still warns, "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? Come out from them and be separate." But this warning is to keep pagan ways and beliefs out of the church, not keep pagan people from hearing the Gospel. This warning is to keep false teaching *out* but not keep the Gospel *in*. We are not *of* the world, but God has kept us *in* the world so that we might go into *all* the world and preach the good news to *all* creation.

So don't think of our church as just a place of worship and teaching and fellowship for only those of us who are already Lutheran. Like Peter, have a change of mindset. Christ died for everyone in our community of Darmstadt. Let us bring that message of God's salvation not only to our children but also to our neighbor. Let us go to Jew and the Gentile and every ethnicity. Don't call anyone unclean whom God can make clean through the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.