

EASTER: A Wider Vision

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ACTS 10: 1-17, 34-38

In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort, as it was called. ²He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God. ³One afternoon at about three o'clock he had a vision in which he clearly saw an angel of God coming in and saying to him, 'Cornelius.' ⁴He stared at him in terror and said, 'What is it, Lord?' He answered, 'Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. ⁵Now send men to Joppa for a certain Simon who is called Peter; ⁶he is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside.' ⁷When the angel who spoke to him had left, he called two of his slaves and a devout soldier from the ranks of those who served him, ⁸and after telling them everything, he sent them to Joppa.

⁹ About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city,

Peter went up on the roof to pray. ¹⁰He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance. ¹¹He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. ¹²In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. ¹³Then he heard a voice saying, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat.' ¹⁴But Peter said, 'By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean.' ¹⁵The voice said to him again, a second time, 'What God has made clean, you must not call profane.' ¹⁶This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven.

¹⁷ Now while Peter was greatly puzzled about what to make of the vision that he had seen, suddenly the men sent by Cornelius appeared. They were asking for Simon's house and were standing by the gate.

³⁴ Then Peter began to speak to them: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. ³⁷That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: ³⁸how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.

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REFLECT & DISCUSS

1. Read the passage slowly. Then take a deep breath and read it again. What word, phrase or image stands out to you?
2. Notice that Peter denies God's visionary prodding not once, not twice, but three times. When else has Peter *denied* the way of God? (hint: Luke 22:54-62)

How is this denial similar and different to that previous denial?

3. Peter's vision challenges an important (and identity-shaping) way of reading and living out the scriptures (see Deut 14:3-19; Lev 11:1-23). Reading and living out the scriptures remains a "work in progress" for us as God might prod us to reconsider what we thought certain ideas, words, and teachings mean.
 - a. How have you changed your mind about something in scripture?
 - b. Have you ever had a challenging or life-changing shift in your understanding of your faith? What happened?
4. The thrust of this episode is a more inclusive church—one that allows Gentiles (Cornelius) to be included *as Gentiles*. In what ways does the church continue to struggle for wider inclusion and acceptance? In what ways do you create welcome and inclusion for people into the

family of God?

5. Sometimes it takes a little time to figure something out. Peter was "greatly puzzled" by his spiritual experience, and only after encountering Cornelius did it all begin to fall into place. What about your faith or spirituality "greatly puzzles" you? What are you seeking to figure out as you grow in faith?