

Let us pray together: **Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.**

Do any of you own a product that has caused you to change the way you live or communicate? Give me a few examples. (Wait for replies.) Computer, the internet, mobile smart phones. If you look back ten years, maybe even five years ago, could you have imagined that you'd be able to communicate with your friends across the country using Facebook? Did you imagine that the same power that was in your desk computer would now be available in your smart phone? Did you see the demise of charging for long distance calls – even international calls? Much has changed in the last few years.

Just think about self-driving cars. How will these vehicles change our society? Will we need as many auto repair shops? Will the car insurance business be affected?

The devices or services I just mentioned changed our society, our culture – and the change was so major, that change is called disruptive change. Depending on your point-of-view, some changes are good, others are not so good. You may like, or you may not like the way the change disrupted your life or your family's life.

The story from the scripture we're about to read together caused Peter to rethink the requirements to be a Christ-follower and disrupted the early Christians' culture. The early church was almost exclusively composed of folks who were Jewish. As Jews, they had been taught from an early age not to associate with the unclean, the Gentiles. The Jews lived their lives avoiding contact in any way with uncircumcised, unclean people. And, they followed strict dietary rules avoiding certain foods. This was a practice that had been followed for centuries.

In this one story in Acts, all this tradition and practice changed in just a few days. The change was disruptive to the beliefs and practices of the early Jewish Christians. The change caused questioning and issues for those dealing with these startling words from God.

Let's look at the whole story to see how this disruption happened.

1. Read Acts 10:1-8 – pew Bible page 130 in the New Testament paging. Note that the person introduced in this story is a Roman citizen, a Gentile, one of the uncircumcised. However, he was a devout man who believed in the God of the Hebrew people. As we read, you can see that God was at work in Cornelius' life long before Peter shows up. Which is the next part of the story. Cornelius' people go off to Joppa to find the man the angel told Cornelius to contact.

2. Read Acts 10:9-16

Did you notice that Peter protested? Eating what he was shown was radical, disruptive information. Peter said he'd never eaten anything unclean. How many times did God show Peter the vision? Three times. I guess the message was so shocking to Peter that God wanted to make sure he got it! This vision was startling and foreign to Peter and to follow it would be disruptive to Peter's life.

3. Read Acts 10:17-23a

Cornelius' people arrive in Joppa. Following the Angel's direction, they ask for Peter. Please note that the Holy Spirit is working overtime here to direct Peter – "go with them without hesitation."

4. Read Acts 10:23b-33

Some of the believers from Joppa accompanied Peter. Perhaps they were worried that Peter would make himself unclean or violate the Jewish dietary laws. As hard as it is for us to understand, this is probably the first time that Peter had entered a Gentile's home. And it must have been difficult. Peter himself admits his prejudice and training when he says, "You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile."

5. Read Acts 10:34-43

Peter may be slowly grasping God's direction to him. "God shows no partiality." Then Peter shares the Good News with Cornelius' household as he has done so often in the past. But this time, he was sharing it with a Gentile in a Gentile's home. A totally new experience for Peter who had only shared the story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection with other Jews.

6. Read Acts 10:44-48

The Holy Spirit comes on all of Cornelius' household and they start speaking in tongues, a sign they have received the Holy Spirit. As you can see from the picture, Peter looks a bit puzzled. He's startled that God has given the Holy Spirit before baptism. To Peter's credit, he realizes what God is doing and then baptizes the whole household.

All of this is startling, new, earth-shaking, disruptive. Yet Peter accepts God's vision for an all-inclusive church. But the story is not over. Peter has to deal with those who still believe that Jesus died only for the Jews. Let me read the rest of the story.

Read Acts 11:1-18 abbreviated version.

Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God. 2 So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him, 3 saying, "Why did you

go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?” 4 Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step,

Peter then repeated the whole story we just read with the outcome:

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.”

God is an inclusive God. And God is a disruptive God. Can you make changes in your long-held beliefs and practices? How do you know when to be inclusive and accepting? Obviously, when the Holy Spirit directs you! But all of us also know how to be inclusive and accepting by following Jesus’ example as revealed in Scripture.

Jesus broke the Jewish religious laws. He did so to minister to the outcasts of society. He healed on the Sabbath. He was touched by a menstruating woman. He touched the leper. He welcomed little children and preferred the company of sinners over saints. Jesus’ ministry revealed that God was all-inclusive instead of exclusive. Jesus was a spirit-driven disrupter. He caused major change.

Jesus changed the world of religion by replacing old religious laws with a new and better approach – love everyone equally, no exceptions. Our scripture from John, verse 12 quotes Jesus directly: **“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”** And we know that Jesus loved everyone, even the outcasts of society.

Jesus wants us to love the immigrant lawn workers, to reach out to the neighborhood teen who is isolated and alone, to support the battered women’s shelter, to visit those who are in the nursing homes or are home-bound, to feed the sick, to care of the homeless.

Jesus wants us to be a disruptive force for equality and inclusion in our society. We saw this clearly in the story from Acts - the Spirit fell on the Gentiles and welcomed them into the community of believers.

As one author put it: God is saying, “I have come to life in Jesus Christ and in the presence of the Holy Spirit to break down all that separates you from me. As with Cornelius, I have heard your prayers. I (God) have come to visit your house no matter how humble it might be. I pour out my spirit of life upon you. I break down the barriers of sin, Satan, and death that have kept you from me. Even to you this day I give the possibility of repentance unto life.” (www.workingpreacher.com, May 17, 2009 Richard Jensen)

Won’t you join Jesus in this work? There’s much to do.

May God bless your every effort, and as you love one another as Jesus has loved you, may Jesus’ joy be in you.