

May 12 2013 Mother's Day

**Scripture Lessons** ~ *Revelation 22:1-5*

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there anymore. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

*Acts 11-1-10*

Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him, saying, 'Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?' Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step, saying, 'I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. There was something like a large sheet coming down from heaven, being lowered by its four corners; and it came close to me. As I looked at it closely I saw four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air. I also heard a voice saying to me, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat." But I replied, "By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth." But a second time the voice answered from heaven, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." This happened three times; then everything was pulled up again to heaven.

**Sermon**      *Time to Change the Sheets*

When I was a small child, my mother could be described as a "clean nut." She was mopping and waxing floors constantly, she was defrosting the freezer, refrigerator, she was always dusting, hunting for cobwebs and washing towels and linens. And that was just on a weekly basis. During spring cleaning everything came out of every room in the house for a thorough top to bottom scrubbing. And sometimes my sister and I feared if we held still my mother would mop and wax us as well. But we did look forward to our Mom's weekly, or if I remember correctly, every other week with the changing of the sheets on our beds. With a clean pair of

pajamas nothing felt better or smelt fresher than those clean white sheets, especially when she was still hanging them on the clothes line to dry in the spring and summer breeze.

The story of St. Peter in his fascinating and pivotal vision which Susan shared with us from the books of Acts depicts the changing of the sheets of a wholly different story. While the vision had a very literally and immediate meaning for Peter and his fellow disciples; it also has tremendous implication for the future conduct for their ministry and our ministry as well for modern day as we seek to share the love of Jesus within our homes; in our churches; in our working; in our play and even in the very lives we live day by of day as disciples of Jesus. Luke, who is the writer of Acts, sets the stage for us for Peter's call back for a sort of check in meeting in the city of Jerusalem after his missionary travels along the sea coast along Judea and various cities including the city of Joppa.

Keep in mind now, that in this early stage of the game the Christians Way as it was called was very much a movement anchored in the Jewish faith. Under the authority of the Jerusalem church, most likely headed by Jesus' brother James, and as a movement within Judaism the attention was constantly pressed whether new Christian converts had to practice their faith as Jews following Jewish traditions as well; and whether this new covenant of God even included non-Jews or Gentiles at all.

Now most of us associate the opening up of the Christian faith to the Gentiles with St. Paul was often called the Apostle to the Gentiles but the Holy Spirit of God was also working among the Gentiles in the ministry of Peter and those who worked with Peter as well. When Peter appears before the Elders in the Jerusalem church he was not dealing with a particularly friendly crowd at all. They had heard of his activities among the Gentiles and those activities needed an immediate explanation. This is where Peter's vision of the sheets comes into play. The immediate meaning has to do, I believe, with the dietary laws because the sheets is filled with all manner of creatures, clean and unclean and the command to kill and eat is at least one level a message to Peter and his missionaries that the ritual laws of the Jewish faith may no longer apply in Jesus new expression of that faith.

But I think there is a wider and more symbolical meaning to that vision as well; one that would change the course of the Christian Way for generations to come. It has to do with the logical conclusion that can be drawn from this vision. If the ritual laws of Judaism no longer applied to Christians and as Peter relates that God's spirit and God's presence has been alike with the Jews and the Gentiles then there is no distinguishing between people where God is concerned. The walls between Jews and Gentiles have been broken down and God's love, God's promises, and God's blessings are open to all people and that is what makes us a

Christian family and which brings us into the present day. If the Gentiles were to be despised; if they were the unclean; if they were the untouchables in Jesus day; we are the Gentiles. If they were the ones whom God's laws and God's conent did not apply in the eyes of God's children of that day, the question remains who are the despised? Who are the unclean? Who are the untouchables of our day? What is their race? What is their sex? What is their national origin? What is their economic status? What is their profession? What is their place in the eyes of the larger society? I think it is important that we answer the question for ourselves and then take the next unthinkable step and extend the arms of God's love to the very people that we might despise; the very people that we might hate; the very people that we might constantly put down in our conversation or even avoid.

Breaking down the walls that divide us from one to another; I know it is not an easy thing to do; I know there won't be immediate love fest breaking all over Pend Oreille County as results of my sermon today. But I do know that we as followers of Jesus have to fill in the blanks with who our despised groups are and answer Peter's question for ourselves. If then God gave them, whoever they are, the same gifts that he gave us when we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; .who am I that I could hinder God? Who am I that I could hinder God? I think is a question that we could ponder on during of journey of faith in the weeks to come. And together we say. AMEN