

## Fifth Week of Easter

Trinity, Alamogordo May 18, 2025

### ACTS 11:1-18

<sup>1</sup> Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. <sup>2</sup> So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, <sup>3</sup> "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them." <sup>4</sup> But Peter began and explained it to them in order: <sup>5</sup> "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, something like a great sheet descending, being let down from Heaven by its four corners, and it came down to me. <sup>6</sup> Looking at it closely, I observed animals and beasts of prey and reptiles and birds of the air. <sup>7</sup> And I heard a voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.' <sup>8</sup> But I said, 'By no means, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' <sup>9</sup> But the voice answered a second time from Heaven, 'What God has made clean, do not call common.' <sup>10</sup> This happened three times, and all was drawn up again into Heaven. <sup>11</sup> And behold, at that very moment three men arrived at the house in which we were, sent to me from Caesarea. <sup>12</sup> And the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. <sup>13</sup> And he told us how he had seen the angel stand in his house and say, 'Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter; <sup>14</sup> he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.' <sup>15</sup> As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. <sup>16</sup> And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' <sup>17</sup> **If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"** <sup>18</sup> **When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has given repentance unto life."**

### IN THE NAME OF JESUS.

The Lord gives gifts, we are given to.

To not receive gifts from him, to take things on our own terms, that's how we gave ourselves over to death in the Garden of Eden.

When we confuse who is being given to with who is giving the gift, that's our sin. In our sin, we make God not into a Lord who gives gifts, but a stingy Lord, not letting anyone have anything without working for it. We make him into a God with a calculator adding up who deserves what.

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So, we find Peter at the church in Jerusalem. He's back from the Gentile areas, and he's reporting on how it goes with the new Gentile Christians.

Those in Jerusalem were asking about these new Christians. The question was, *Are these new Christians full Israelites, or do they need to do something more to make themselves fully clean?* Acts 11:17:

**[Peter said,] "If then God gave the same gift to [the Gentiles] as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"**

The gift given to the Gentiles, the gift gathering them into the church—it's the Gospel. It's the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins, the gift of being baptized into the Name of the Lord—it was the same gift given to those in Jerusalem.

Peter does not want to stand in the way of that.

Peter will not make God into a stingy God keeping score, demanding the sinner cleanse himself in order to qualify. He will speak of God as what he is in his Gospel: a generous giver of gifts, a God who, through his Son Christ Jesus, refuses to count of sin and rejoices in cleansing the sinner.

Acts 11:5:

<sup>5</sup> [Peter said,] “I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, something like a great sheet descending, being let down from Heaven by its four corners, and it came down to me. Looking at it closely, I observed animals and beasts of prey and reptiles and birds of the air. And I heard a voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.' But I said, 'By no means, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' But the voice answered a second time from Heaven, 'What God has made clean, do not call common.'"

Peter knew the Law—the Temple law, the ceremonial law, the regulations about what could be eaten and what is not given to be eaten.

These O.T. regulations weren't about health—for how could it be unhealthy to eat pork in the generations preceding the cross, then one day after the cross, it's suddenly okay.

These O.T. laws weren't about health or hygiene.

They were given to show distinction. By these ceremonial laws, God gave a way for the Israelite to look at a sheep, for instance, and say, *Good, my Lord gave that to me as a gift to eat*, and to look at, say, a pig and say, *my Lord gave this to me to not eat of*.

After the cross, after Jesus atoned for all sin, it's all clean.

The sheep and the pig, the trout and the lobster—everything clean. No distinctions. The Lord gives it all as gift. ***What God has declared clean, let no one call unclean.***

Which means, those Christians living outside Jerusalem, those up in Caesarea, even up in Greece, *clean*. The blood of Jesus says no less.

He cleanses in Baptism; he names sinners as his own.

He gives gifts, we are the ones given to.

God the Father gave his only begotten Son, the gift for every sinner.

God the Son, cleanses the sinner with his own blood—the gift of salvation.

God the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, and enlightens, bringing sinners into the church to receive all the gifts of the Gospel.

The one given to? It's the sinner.

Sinners in Jerusalem, sinners up in Caesarea, sinners up in Greece, sinners of our own generation, including us, all gathered into the Church, the New Israel.

Acts 11:18:

**When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has given repentance unto life."**

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This is all by gift. Our Lord wants to be the Lord of gifts to us.

When we think that our life before God is a result of our feelings or our works or our decisions, this is our attempt to live by the Law. That is our sinful flesh, the Old Adam, or Old Man of sin, as the Apostle Paul refers to it. When we come before God with what we have decided or what we can do, then we will find a God of Law. But by the Law, no sinner will live.

God wants to be to us the God of Gospel, of gifts. So, he comes to us not in the strength of his Law, by which every sinner will only die, but in the weakness and humility of the cross, in the Word of mercy, in the gift of the Gospel of all sins forgiven. By the preaching of this Word of Gospel, God daily creates in us a clean heart. The clean heart, the heart of faith, that is, as Paul tells us, the New Adam, the New Man of faith, who lives before God not by the righteousness of works of the Law, but by faith in the atoning blood of Christ Jesus, sent to us as pure gift.

Now, in this life of faith the Lord daily creates in us by his Word, we can see that even the knowledge of our sin is gift. For if God doesn't give his Law to accuse, we would deny our sin.

And knowing that the Law accuses us and we have no righteousness of our own at the face of God, we then rejoice in the Gospel, which never accuses, but only and fully bestows all the gifts of grace of our Lord Jesus.

The knowledge of Jesus atoning for our sin on the cross is gift. For if we are not given the words of the Gospel, we wouldn't even know that the cross is a gift given to us in Baptism, and brought to us in the Body and Blood of the Lord's Supper.

Our fellow Christians, too. We now may look at them and see that they, too, are gifts to us of brothers and sisters in Christ. We, along with them: cleansed by the word of Gospel. And what God makes clean, let no one call unclean.

**IN THE NAME OF JESUS.**