

Could you stand in the way?

Acts 11:1-18

May 15, 2022

We have been looking at the scriptures from Acts these past few Sundays. Can you imagine those days? What were the Jews thinking? Their religious leaders were saying that Jesus was a fraud, that He got His due on the cross. Yes, there was some question about all this talk of Jesus rising from the dead but people away from Jerusalem may not have heard or they were taking the account of His body being stolen to heart. Along comes Peter and what is he doing? He is associating with Gentiles and even going so far as to eat with them, a sign that they were close to each other, friends.

Even though as Lutherans, drinking a beer or two isn't a big deal but what if your pastor was one to stop off at a bar on the way home a few times a week? What would, even Lutherans, let alone Baptists be saying, be thinking? They might say I shouldn't be a pastor and maybe I need to get some help.

That is how the circumcision crowd was looking at Peter. How could he be eating with them, let alone even associating with them? How many thought that and didn't even want Peter to give an answer and just went off in disgust? Luckily there were some who maybe wanted to do more to Peter and stuck around to hear what he had to say. So how does Peter explain himself? It says he began by explaining it to them in order.

Peter goes into the vision that the Lord gave him of the great sheet descending from heaven. In it were all kinds of animals, evidently they were unclean animals. In Leviticus 11, Moses lists all those animals and birds that were not to be eaten. We all remember the split hoof, the chewing of the cud, the fish with scales and birds like vultures that like to feed on dead things.

Now when Peter was describing the vision, don't you know how those of the circumcision party's stomachs must have been churning to think about eating those animals and birds? Might be something like thinking about eating your dog or cat or maybe eating a buzzard that was just eating roadkill. There is a guy on TV that tries all kinds of dead meat. Some I might like to try, others, I don't think so.

Peter was told to kill and eat. He was told three times. Did the number of times click with him as he was told by Jesus, three times, to feed my sheep? Eating, feeding sheep, himself, maybe it set his mind at ease or at least he saw this as his needed

acceptance of those he was to go to. He knew Jesus died for all but now it hit home as to whom he should extend his efforts for Jesus and His command.

Peter begins with the vision and then goes on to tell of the three brothers in the faith, evidently Gentiles who were brought to faith who came from Caesarea. The Holy Spirit tells him to go with them so he and six of the Apostles go. The three were sent to bring him to a man who had heard from the Angel to send for Peter who he said would declare a message of salvation, not only for him but for his whole household.

Peter and the rest go. When they get there, Peter begins to speak and the Holy Spirit fell on them as it did on him and the other Apostles. They were given the same gift.

Peter then makes the statement, logical and matter-of-factly. "Who was I that I could stand in God's way?" Peter was saying to do anything less than trust that the Gentiles were included as all other men, was wrong. It took a little while, as they fell silent, to reason in their minds based on the account, to accept, by the power of the Holy Spirit, this new teaching so different from the past. This would take a mind change that would open up their world and their responsibility in the world the Lord had placed them in.

We have this account of how Peter was changed and others too by the power of the Holy Spirit. Their narrow view of the world was changed, opened up to where they now saw their influence to be unlimited. The world was out there to witness to. It didn't make any difference who the person was, when there was the question of salvation and where it could be had, they would have the answer. When people wondered how their world could be different, better, they would have the best answer for them and that would be as it is for you, Jesus.

Jesus has given you the words of eternal life. Maybe you should start at the beginning in order. Those Peter were talking too, knew the beginning. They knew of Genesis and the Old Testament. All that they knew would be part of their arsenal as they went out, not only into the Jewish world looking for the Messiah who had already come but now they would use the whole story with the Gentiles of how it all began and how sin entered the world with the first two humans. They, could tell of how God told of one who would be sent to take care of sin. They could then tell how the Jews were chosen and how the Lord preserved them over the years as they waited for the promised Son who has come from the Jews, to pay the price for their and the sin of the

world. They could point out the need for all to look to Him, the source of salvation, they source of hope for all, even the worst of sinners.

Might there been some hesitancy on the part of the circumcision party as they went out from there and encountered Gentiles in their lives? Don't you know the Devil would be whispering for them to reject what they now had accepted? How could they touch them, eat with them, look at them without thinking maybe they got it wrong?

We all know the story of the sower of the seed. Not all the seed produced more. No, various things happened to the seed. The rich young ruler also had his hangups. Even some trees were affected, didn't produce.

We have this memorable account of Peter and the large sheet coming down out of heaven to be a lesson for Peter to see for himself of how far the salvation of Jesus was to go. This was not just to the chosen of God but also those who he never thought he would have to deal with. Yet now, he was opened up to an even greater challenge and joy of knowing that Jesus came for him and for all.

When you witness or thinking about witnessing to someone, what goes through your heads? I'm sure you trust the Lord will provide for you and for them and yet, as you think about what will work, will tweak their interest and get them to actually think about what you have to say, what do you need to open your mouth with the greatest gift they could ever receive?

Peter probably had a pretty good idea what to say to the Jews as he had heard how Jesus dealt with them so many times. Yes, they were all surprised many times but as Jesus sent them out 2 by 2, they saw how the Holy Spirit went before them to prepare hearts to hear. They were given power to go out and proclaim the work of the Lord for the world.

The thing of it is, it is now in your court. There are many in your lives who don't know that they too are wanted by Jesus in heaven with Him. They have the wrong idea how to get to Jesus though. So many think they have to be good enough to get to heaven. Some will know they aren't good enough. Those think they "deserve" to go to hell? They think they now have no hope so why not just do what they want, when they want to do it? Taking a life is not a problem, hell won't be any worse for them if they do or don't kill they think. No, all that is important to them is their life in the here and now.

Then there are the vast majority who think they are good enough. Surely they do enough good that God will look at them and say to them welcome, you are a good person, I will be happy to have someone as good as you to live with me in heaven.

They have looked and evaluated their lives based on their own set of laws. They are certain that heaven awaits them when they die. They **all** will be wrong if they are trusting in their goodness, works, their being Lutheran or anything else other than Jesus.

So what do you need to know to follow where Jesus leads you? You know so much. They are either believers or they aren't. Two things. They either trust that what Jesus did on the cross is theirs or not. Same two things. So you need to find out that answer to two questions? When those two are sorted out then you can praise God that they are believers, shake their hands and move on or you can then praise God that they aren't believers and Jesus has led you to them to learn from them, yes, learn from them the who, what, when, where, why and how, just as any good investigative reporter would do.

Who do they think they are before an all powerful and righteous God, a sinner or a good person? What do they consider is a good person? Where do they look to base what they consider in order to come up with their thinking? How would they say they are going to get to heaven and why, as they look at themselves, would God allow them into heaven.

If they say they don't deserve heaven then you can go straight to the Gospel where all, even those who consider themselves not worthy have had their sins paid for by Jesus who came to this earth for them, even if they were the only person alive to die for. He loves them so much. Not their sin, not what they think would keep them out of heaven could stop His love for them, John 3:16-17. They may not accept it at the time but as the Lord gives them more time, the Holy Spirit will continue to work to provide hope, hope that God might just be that loving God so many people say He is.

It is the others that may require more work on your part. It may take time to figure another angle on how to get to the thing that the Holy Spirit will use to bring about the faith.

The Bible doesn't talk about giving up on a person. It talks of praying and continuing to witness to them even as the woman kept at it with the judge. She wanted a good ruling from the judge, we want the Holy Spirit to keep working, even though for our part it might just be hardening the heart of the person we witness to.

Peter said, "Who was I that I could stand in God's Way?" Who are you who has been given the same faith as Peter to stand in God's way of using you as he did Peter?