The Spirit for All Peoples (Acts 10:1–48)

Introduction: This morning we are continuing in our series, *The Holy Spirit Series: Book of Acts Edition.*

My faith journey can be defined by geographical movement and each had become individual defining moments:

- HK→TO (re-commitment and calling to serve God fulltime);
- TO→Vancouver (theological shift);
- TO→Aberdeen (experiential-ecclesiological shift);
- Scarborough→Markham (church planting).

This morning we shall see how one of the Apostle Peter's defining moments played out in the divinely orchestrated encounter with a god-fearer Roman army officer Cornelius at Caesarea – they are some 48 km/30 mi away from each other.

Luke definitely has regarded this incident to be significant enough to commit a large amount of ink in recording it because it is the **Gentile Pentecost**—the pivotal moment the Gospel shattered ethnic boundaries and began its social impact and expansion into the Roman Empire.

The event is not a mere human encounter between two individuals but shows the dynamic work of the Holy Spirit.[1]

In Acts 10 we see this:

Prayer and divine guidance is the scarlet thread that ties the extraordinary revelations together.

[1] Cf. Jesus' prophecy in Acts 1:8, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Prayer is the "atmosphere of revelation" when we see God's sovereign involvement in the day-to-day living of ordinary people, inside and outside of the faith community.

One afternoon about three o'clock, he had ***a vision*** in which he saw an angel of God coming toward him. "Cornelius!" the angel said … "***Now send some men to Joppa, and summon a man named Simon Peter*** … ***The next day as Cornelius's messengers were nearing the town*** [i.e., Joppa], ***Peter went up on the flat roof to pray***. It was about noon, and he was hungry. But while a meal was being prepared, ***he fell into a trance***. He saw the sky open, and something like a large sheet was let down by its four corners. In the sheet were all sorts of animals, reptiles, and birds. ***Then a voice said to him, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat them***." (Acts 10:3, 5, 9-13 NLT)

Here we see that extraordinary vision, personal guidance, timely instructions and inspiring moments happen in prayer time – God communicates to those who pray, regardless of whether they are already "inside" the faith community or are seekers like Cornelius.

The Holy Spirit enables us to see the world the way God sees it and stirs our hearts to fee God's pulse through prayer.

Prayer is the atmosphere of revelation … the climate in which God's manifestation bursts open into inspiration …in prayer, our Creator still creating … It is letting Him pray in us.

P. T Forsyth

Prayer is not about changing God's mind or manipulating a "designer-god" for our benefit. The Spirit prompts and transforms us to be the kind of people He intended since the beginning of time.

Prayer is about pressing the "hot-sync" button of our body, soul, and spirit to synchronize our lives with God's will.

As in the case of Peter, the greatest issue is not the silence of God, but his refusal to listen the promptings of the Spirit and/or his resistance to change.

When he sees the vision of a large sheet let down from the sky containing all sorts of animals, his response is immediate refusal to eat:

"***No, Lord,***" Peter declared. "I have never eaten anything that our Jewish laws have declared impure and unclean." But the voice spoke again: "***Do not call something unclean if God has made it clean.***" The same vision was repeated ***three*** times. (Acts 10:14-16 NLT)

God has to do it 3x before Peter responded – cf. 3 denials of Jesus, 3 re-affirmations by the risen Christ. And now we have 3 repeats of the vision.

Peter, a stubborn and intense man with a Type A temperament, seems to be stuck in the OT dietary food laws and Jewish traditions.

But to Peter this isn't just about diet- it's about *purity*, about who is *in* and who is *out*. If he has eaten that, he can't worship at the Temple. If he has associated with people who have eaten that, he would be considered "unclean." This has been a 1500 years old tradition.

In this case his failure to hear God's message is more about Peter's devotion to purity laws but mixed with his fear of Jewish people's reactions or criticism, and his prejudice (pre-judging) against non-Jews.

Like Peter, we often try to put God in a box because of

our fear to get out of comfort zone,

or just doing "what we have been doing all the time,"

or "just being politically correct,"

or a lack of faith.

The Spirit does His preparatory work and set things in motion unbeknown to Cornelius and Peter so God's greater purposes will be fulfilled.[2]

See, Cornelius and Peter are miles apart geographically, culturally, and religiously. Humanly speaking, there is no chance they will ever become brothers.

But watch how the Holy Spirit moves: He speaks to Cornelius through an angel, and then He prepares Peter's heart.

Cornelius stared at him in terror. "What is it, sir?" he asked the angel. And the angel replied, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have been received by God as an offering! ***Now send some men to Joppa, and summon a man named Simon Peter*** … So I sent for you [Peter] at once, and it was good of you to come. ***Now we are all here, waiting before God to hear the message the Lord has given you***" (Acts 10:4-5, 33 NLT).

The angel of God prepares ahead of time the hearts of Cornelius, his household, relatives and friends to receive God's message through Peter's words and experience the life transforming power of the Spirit.

Meanwhile, as Peter was puzzling over the vision, the Holy Spirit said to him, "Three men have come looking for you. ***Get up, go downstairs, and go with them without hesitation***. Don't worry, for I have sent them." (Acts 10:19-20 NLT)

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[2] Cf. William J. Larkin Jr., *Acts*, p.154.

Prayer is more about listening to the Holy Spirit's guidance so one can know how to participate in God's mission than satisfying our convenience and comfort.

The vision he had earlier finally makes sense to Peter who says to Cornelius, "You know it is against our laws for a Jewish man to enter a Gentile home like this or to associate with you. But ***God has shown me*** that I should no longer think of anyone as impure or unclean … I see very clearly that ***God shows no favoritism***. In every nation he accepts those who fear him and do what is right."(Acts 10:34-35 NLT)

The Spirit shows Peter that the strict separation between Jews and Gentiles is *shattered* by the cross of Jesus Christ:

There is no space for any ethnocentric inside-out posture because God defines each individual's worth and value.

The Spirit breaks down geographical, gender, and ethnic/religious barriers and brings grace-filled wholeness to all because God's love makes space and penetrates into the darkest corner of human prejudices/pride. As Marty Solomon says,

"The fullest truth is that God sees all the rightness and wrongness, innocence and culpability, in everything and in everyone. Far better than we do … He sees not only the obvious blameworthiness of the bad guys but also the hidden guilt of the good guys. When we divide the world quickly and neatly into sides, we can let blame shift all onto one end of the scale (which, conveniently, is always their end), but God is not easily fooled. He desires to be gracious to everyone …"[3]

Peter becomes a promoter for the inclusion of the Gentiles, and while he's preaching the gospel message about Jesus (Acts 10:36-43), the Holy Spirit *by-passes* human protocols and interrupts:

[3] Marty Solomon, *The Gospel of Being Human*, p. 161f.

Even as Peter was saying these things, ***the Holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening to the message***. The Jewish believers who came with Peter were amazed that ***the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles, too***. For they heard them speaking in other tongues and praising God. Then Peter asked, "***Can anyone object to their being baptized, now that they have received the Holy Spirit just as we did?***" So he gave orders for them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. (Acts 10:44-48 NLT)

This mirrors the experience of the Jewish believers in Acts 2, proving that the gift of the Spirit is not reserved for one ethnic group and the visible and audible evidence was the Spirit's "seal of approval" on the Gentile mission.

Both Cornelius and Peter need the Holy Spirit to transform their hearts.

This, of course, has immediate relevance to us at Cornerstone where our vision is to develop an intentional intercultural community of faith, to build relational bridges with people in our spheres of influence, and to serve our community in wholesome manners.

Cornerstone is a multi-ethnic congregation but still needing to learn how to intentionally interact with and transform one another so to becoming more an intercultural church.

Now in Cornerstone we have people from over 50 different countries of origin, serving the most diverse region in Canada. Hence, the challenge is to develop deeper intercultural Jesus-centered relationships inwardly, while reaching the world in our neighbourhoods inclusively]!

Keep in mind our four guiding priorities:

- Deeper and wider discipleship

- Building bridges across difference
- Joining God in our neighbourhood
- Cornerstone Centre as a hub of connection and belonging [for the wider community])

In this post-pandemic "cancel culture" world marked by loneliness and tribalism, Cornerstone is called to be a working model of a kingdom mosaic.

We “pray out loud” by putting aside our preferences and prejudice to reach out to others who are not “like us”!

Conclusion: Here is an important lesson,

The ambiguity of God’s guidance is progressively clarified by faith in obedience, one step at a time.

Hold a posture of holy expectancy - trust the Holy Spirit working ahead of us.

Let me share with you my experience at a church prayer meeting in Vancouver.

Vision is not given for our ecstasy but for missions, for understanding how our role fits into God’s purpose in bringing “peace on earth.” Prayer is the "atmosphere of revelation" as we remain faithful in pursuing our God-entrusted mission.