

Acts 10:34-48 (Sixth Sunday of Easter—Series B)

“No Partiality”

Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield CT

May 9, 2021

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our text for this morning is the First Reading from Acts 10:

So Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles

There’s a story about a Chicago bank that once asked for a letter of recommendation on a young Bostonian being considered for employment. The Boston investment house could not say enough about the young man. His father, they wrote, was a Cabot; his mother was a Lowell. Further back was a happy blend of Saltonstalls, Peabodys, and other of Boston’s first families. His recommendation was given without hesitation. Several days later, the Chicago bank sent a note saying the information supplied was altogether inadequate. It read: “We are not contemplating using the young man for breeding purposes. Just for work.” This Chicago bank was not a respecter of persons, even for a man with such a prestigious lineage. God also is not respecter of persons, someone who shows favoritism or partiality, but in every nation the ones who fear Him and work righteousness are acceptable to Him.

Peter learned this Biblical truth when he visited the home of Cornelius, a Roman centurion who lived in the city of Caesarea. St. Luke records in Acts 10, "Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter lifted him up, saying, 'Stand up; I too am a man.' And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered. And [Peter] said to them, 'You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me.' And Cornelius said, 'Four days ago, about this hour, I was praying in my house at the ninth hour, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.' So I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord'" (Acts 10:24-33). It is at this point that Peter opened his mouth and said, "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation the ones who fear Him and work righteousness are acceptable to Him."

God is not a respecter of persons, meaning that He is not partial to the Jew because he is a Jew. God is not unfair the Gentile because he is a Gentile. God commissioned His Word, the proclamation of the Good News of peace through Jesus Christ, to be announced indiscriminately to people no matter what their ethnic, social, political, or even religious background. In Acts 10 we see the embodiment of God's desire recorded in 1 Timothy 2:4.

The Triune God “desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” The Gospel of peace is that truth because Jesus the Word-made-flesh is the way, and the truth, and the life. “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil. . . . They put Him to death by hanging Him on a tree, but God raised Him on the third day. . . . To Him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name.”

How could God withhold this life-changing, life-saving message of forgiveness and eternal life, this blessed means of salvation, from certain people just because of their heritage, or their economic status, their skin color, or their current religious beliefs? Our gracious Lord wants all people to know Jesus Christ, His only Son, who came to save the world from sin and death. He wants them to trust in Jesus Christ as their only Savior who died on the cross, rescuing them from death and hell. God longs that people confess Jesus Christ as Lord and God. God wishes that those who know Christ by faith live the Christian life of faith and good works empowered by the Lord Christ Himself through the Holy Spirit. These are the people who are acceptable to Him—those who live by faith in the Son of God, who also live out that life of faith in the works of righteousness, the works of love.

Our Triune God is not some shallow deity who chooses people because of how they act or what they wear or how much money they have or whether they are descendents of leading families in society or not. God loved the world—the rich and poor, the powerful and the weak, the Jew and the Gentile, the man and the woman, the adult and the child.

Now, do you and I always love like God loves? "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us," says Paul in Romans 5:5. Yet don't we fail at times to show God's love in Jesus Christ to those we deem not worthy? We sometimes play favorites based on outward appearances. We often show partiality because of a person's social class or economic background. We are frequently respecters of persons based on ethnicity. We need to learn and re-learn what God revealed about His love to Peter so that we too can say with all confidence, "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality!" Having confessed this truth, we then by the power of the Holy Spirit live this truth out in our lives and vocations by sharing the Good News of peace through Jesus Christ with people of every nation, of every economic, social, and religious background.

God shows no partiality. Jesus died on the cross and rose again from the dead winning your complete forgiveness from sin and your eternal salvation. God loved the world! Jesus died for everyone—no matter who they are or how they live or where they come from! He wants all people to receive the forgiveness of sins purchased for them by the blood of Christ!

Realize what this means for you in your life of discipleship and faith! Like Peter, you come in contact with many different people every week. You see them in the store, in school, on the athletic field, in the workplace, and in your neighborhood. There are those who are religiously Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Wiccan, or who knows what. God shows no partiality. God loves all people and He wants them to hear about Jesus from you who know and understand the love of God in Jesus firsthand. God asks you, as He did Peter, "to preach to the people and to testify that [Jesus] is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living

and the dead. . . . Everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name.”

God shows no partiality. God loved the world so that Jesus died on the cross and rose again for all—for those who experience lack of food and clothes, money, car, and home. He died and rose for all races of people—Black, Asian, Hispanic, Caucasian, Native American, European, African, and Eskimo. God shows no partiality. He wants them to hear about Jesus and the forgiveness of sins that brings peace with God so that they might be saved from sin, death, and hell.

The Lord has called you to faith in Jesus Christ in order to be His witnesses of the peace of Christ that comes through the forgiveness of sins won on a cross and guaranteed by the empty tomb. Be filled with the Holy Spirit and grow in the love of God toward others, showing no partiality to them because of outward things. Love them in Christ so much that you share Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection miracle with them. It doesn’t matter who they are. What matters most to the Lord is that they hear about His Son, Jesus Christ, and so receive by faith the forgiveness of sins. God loves them all. And in Christ Jesus, so do we. Amen.