

Nokesville UMC Sunday Worship
May 15, 2022
Rev. YoungMin Kim

God Has No Partiality!
Acts 11:2-10

(1)

According to the Lectionary schedule, we read the Book of Acts 11:2-10. After Stephen, one of the seven deacons in the Jerusalem church, was persecuted and killed, serious persecution broke out in the church in Jerusalem. So, all believers except the apostles were scattered from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria. Before they scattered, they might have thought to save their lives from immediate persecution and crisis and to return to Jerusalem when the persecution would become abated. But an unexpected situation happened. Wherever the scattered believers traveled in Judea and Samaria, they began to spread the Good News about Jesus Christ, performed great wonders and signs among the people, and established churches by the power of the Holy Spirit. As a result, numerous people—both Jews and the Gentiles—repented of their sin, were baptized, and became believers. As Acts 9:31 describes, “the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was built up. Living in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.”

In addition to James, who was Jesus’s brother, Peter became one of the leaders in the Jerusalem church. He was the most beloved disciple of Jesus. Wherever Jesus went, Peter followed Him. Whatever Jesus did, Peter witnessed it right next to Him. I believe Jesus relied on Peter to some degree because after the last supper, Jesus became grieved and agitated, so He went to Gethsemane to pray, and He brought Peter and two other disciples there. Jesus also asked Peter, “Take care of my sheep” (Jn. 21:16). Thus, Peter deserved to become the leader of the church. However, he had a painful moment in his mind and heart all the time. At the crucial moment, Peter denied his Lord three times, and he realized that Jesus turned and looked at him when he denied Jesus. Peter went out and wept bitterly. Everything seemed to fall apart for Peter as he watched Jesus on the path to His death.

While witnessing Jesus being questioned, tortured, and crucified by the Roman soldiers, Peter might have felt strong lethargy about himself as well as strong antipathy against Roman authorities, especially Roman soldiers. Thus, while serving the church in Jerusalem, he must not have thought of spreading the gospel about Jesus to the Gentiles including Roman citizens, especially Roman military officers. Yes! Peter must have had severe social and racial prejudice of the Roman authorities.

(2)

One day, Peter traveled to many areas to meet, take care of, and encourage the emerging churches and the new believers. When he visited a city named Joppa, he met Simon who was a tanner and stayed in his house. The very next day, he went up on the roof to pray as usual. While he prayed, he became hungry, so he wanted some food that could satisfy him. At that moment, he saw a vision, which was the heavens opened and something like a sheet came down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. In the sheet, there were all kinds of four-footed animals, reptiles, and birds. And he heard a voice say, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.” He was shocked because he had never eaten such things that their tradition and laws defined as impure and unclean. But the voice spoke to him, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.” After this happened three times, the sheet was immediately taken back to heaven.

While Peter wondered about the meaning of the vision, three men visited and asked him to come with them because their master Cornelius wanted to see him. Cornelius was a military officer in the Roman Empire who had about a hundred soldiers under him. A Roman citizen...and a military officer in the Roman Empire? Whatever we imagine about him, his authority and power will be beyond our imagination. By the assurance and guidance of the Holy Spirit, Peter followed the servants. On his way to Cornelius, his painful memory as well as his strong antipathy against Roman soldiers might have come into his mind. But all his worries and concerns went away when he met Cornelius. We have no idea how Cornelius came to know about God, but his entire family and he were faithful to God and generous to those in need. They knew about God but must have not known about Jesus Christ. So, Peter began to share Jesus and His gospel with Cornelius. After listening to him, Cornelius and his family were baptized and became believers in Jesus. Peter said, "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation, anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (10:34).

(3)

Yesterday, we heard another tragedy. In the peaceful Saturday afternoon, people went grocery shopping at a Buffalo supermarket. And they came to have a traumatic experience. Wearing the tactical gear, a young man shot four people in the parking lot, and then he went inside the store and shot the guard and shoppers. A total of 13 people were shot and 10 people were killed. Out of the 13 victims, 11 were black. So, the FBI said, the mass shooting in Buffalo is being investigated as a hate crime. It is so sad that we have to worry about our safety and lives when we go grocery shopping.

Do we have any antipathy against those who are different from us—different thoughts, different political orientation, different English accent or different language, different religion, different culture, different skin color, or other things that are different from us? And do we believe that God stands with us but does not with others? Or do we believe that we are right and others are wrong? Peter had believed that God was only with the Israelites, and His grace through Jesus's sacrifice was only for the Jewish believers. But through his vision with the defiled animals that their tradition and laws condemned, and through God's proclamation, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane," Peter came to realize that God has no partiality. Not only for Peter but Jewish Christians at the time also came to believe that "God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life" (11:18). In other words, that was why God sent His only Son Jesus Christ for everyone in every nation. If Peter had not experienced the vision, he and other Jewish Christians may have still believed that God was partial to them, and Paul's mission to the Gentiles would be limited, and consequently, Jesus Christ and His gospel would have still remained in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria for a limited number of people.

But through his vision, Peter opened his eyes to the Gentiles and considered the possibility of salvation among the Gentiles. And as a result, we came to hear the Good News and became children of God through Jesus Christ. This was possible because God was not partial to the Israelites. And it is the same to us. God is not partial to us. This is a calling for us today to open our minds and hearts, accept those who are different from us, and treat them with the love of God without any prejudice. Amen.