

**Worship Series: *Jesus Appears***  
**Service Theme: *As the Anointed One***

**Sermon Theme: *United by the Anointed (January 8, 2023)***  
**Acts 10:34-38**

It all started with a rumbling stomach. Jesus had died, risen, and ascended into Heaven. The Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Apostles at Pentecost. They'd preached boldly and performed amazing miracles. The Christian Church had experienced fierce persecution, but had also grown exponentially, as more and more Jews believed in Jesus was their Savior. And the Apostle Peter was...hungry.

Sitting on a rooftop in Joppa praying, Peter decided it was time for lunch. But while the meal was being prepared, God gave Peter a vision. He saw heaven open, and something like a large sheet descended, filled with all kinds of animals, birds, and reptiles. And God instructed, ***“Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.”***

But unlike grocery shopping when you're hungry and literally everything sounds good, Peter wasn't buying it. As a devout Jew, Peter knew about the dietary restrictions God gave Israel about clean and unclean animals that they could or couldn't eat. But surprisingly, the voice reprimanded Peter, ***“Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.”*** God repeated the vision three times before Peter snapped out of it, wondering what God was getting at.

At the same moment, three men appeared at the house, searching for him. They'd been sent to find Peter by a Roman centurion named Cornelius. Scripture tells us that Cornelius and his family were ***“devout and God-fearing.”*** Which basically meant they believed in and prayed to one God and respected the ethical and moral teachings of the Jews, but hadn't completely converted to Judaism. Like many people today, Cornelius had a general grasp of God's truth, but his understanding was incomplete. So one day earlier, God had also given

Cornelius a vision: an angel who told him to track down Simon Peter in Joppa.

So God brought together this unlikely pair-- a powerful Gentile military leader, and an influential Jewish apostle of the fledgling Christian church-- for an all-important meeting. Peter still wasn't exactly sure what God was up to, but Cornelius knew one thing: This was incredibly important. So he brought together his family and close friends at his house to hear why God was sending Peter to them.

To us, it might seem like no big deal that Peter entered Cornelius's house. But to both Jews and Gentiles in that day, it was absolutely shocking. When they were preparing to enter the Promised Land, God had commanded the Israelites to separate themselves from the pagan, unbelieving nations around them so they wouldn't get caught up in their unbelief, idolatry, and pagan practices. God prescribed certain regulations for the Israelites that set them apart as his chosen people.

But the Jews took those regulations to extremes. Only a Gentile who completely converted to the laws and practices of the Jews would be recognized as a believer. Jews didn't socialize with Gentiles, since Jews were forbidden from entering a Gentile's home, or sharing a meal with them. They even refused to buy food from Gentiles for fear of contamination. Most Jews would be as repulsed at the thought of entering the home of impure, unclean Gentile as Peter was repulsed at the thought of killing and eating unclean animals. And as Gentiles on the outskirts of Judaism, Cornelius and his family certainly understood and had experienced such separation.

So when Peter entered Cornelius's home, he addressed the elephant in the room. ***“You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him.”*** So why had Peter come? He explained, ***“But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean.”***

The meaning of the vision was becoming clear for Peter. God had told him to kill and eat unclean animals, as if those dietary restrictions were no longer necessary distinctions. And as Cornelius revealed that an

angel of God had directed him to call for him, Peter understood that those nationality restrictions were no longer necessary distinctions either! As Peter exclaims, with a sense of wonder, ***“I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.”***

But what could make such a huge difference, uniting Jews and Gentiles who had almost always been separated and segregated as one people? Or rather, who could unite all people? Jesus, the Anointed One!

To complete Cornelius’s understanding of God’s truth, Peter told him and his family and friends the truth about Jesus. Peter preached, ***“You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened through the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil.”*** Peter points to Jesus’ baptism, where God “anointed” Jesus with the Holy Spirit and power.

It’s critically important that we understand the meaning and significance of anointing. In the Old Testament, someone was anointed—usually by having oil poured over their heads—as visual proof that God had chosen them for a special purpose. God’s prophets, priests, and kings were anointed in this way. And almost always, when someone was anointed, Scripture adds that they were ***“filled with the Spirit,”*** empowered to carry out their important purpose.

That’s exactly what happened at Jesus’ baptism too! With water poured over his head instead of oil, the Holy Spirit came down upon Jesus in the form of a dove, and Jesus was anointed and empowered for the specific purpose to which God had called: to save the world! Jesus knew that, later quoting the prophet Isaiah about himself, ***“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.”***

And God had chosen Jesus, his beloved Son, to save not just the Jews, but all nations! As Jesus himself explained, ***“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.”*** Jesus had come to be the perfect substitute sacrifice for the whole world—for all people. As Peter emphasized, God ***“accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.”***

That good news of Jesus, anointed as the Savior of the world turned the light on for Peter. He said, ***“I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism.”*** Literally, in the Greek, he says that God is not a “face grasper.” Meaning, God isn’t fixated on or motivated by what your face looks like; or what color your skin is; or what shape your nose or eyes are. By sending his Son to save the whole world from sin, death, and Hell, God shows he isn’t a “face grasper.”

But so often, aren’t we? In the nearly three years since the death of George Floyd, there has certainly been a concerted effort in America to end systemic racism and stamp out anything that divides. And since God doesn’t show favoritism, we can applaud the motivation behind such a push!

But be honest, have people in America really become more united in the last three years? I’d argue in many ways we’re more divided than ever! As anger and hatred stew, and people get offended, and every action is assumed to have improper motivation. I’d say the reason why we haven’t ended division and racism is because the focus usually isn’t on the spiritual problem of the issue.

Because every person’s sinful nature is intrinsically selfish, we naturally gravitate towards the people who are most like us, who benefit us, who validate our feelings and actions. And that isn’t necessarily bad. But the problem is we also naturally separate ourselves from those who aren’t like us, look down on them, and mistrust them. The Jews had that mindset towards the Gentiles to the point that even Peter walking into Cornelius’s house was shocking!

So maybe the question we need to ask ourselves is, “Whose house would I refuse to walk into?” It can be an issue of race or nationality—

black or white, Asian or Hispanic. A disagreement over religion. A matter of gender. A problem of social standing—you'd never darken the door of some snobby rich person; you do everything you can to avoid homeless people on the street; a conversation about illegal immigrants fills you with a seething rage against them. Maybe it's the Boomers, or Millennials, or Gen-Z that you're always putting down. Maybe you'd never step foot in someone's home who stands on the other side of the political aisle. Maybe you take every opportunity to gossip about or shoot withering glares at people who sin differently than you. When we focus on what is different about us, or what divides us, our sinful nature always looks down on people as inferior to us.

Therefore, to be united with people who are different from us, we need to focus on what is very much the same about us. ***“All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God.”*** That little word “all” changes everything. It doesn't matter if you're Jew or Gentile, black or white, male or female, rich or poor, Republican or Democrat. Everyone is in the exact same boat—sinners who deserve no favor from God, but to be eternally separated from God in Hell. If I know that truth about myself, who can I possibly look down on? Who can I think is less deserving of God's love than me if we're all in the same “sinful, deserving of wrath” reality?

Maybe it's just a coincidence, but did you notice how many times God showed Peter the vision of the sheet? Three. The same number of times that Peter denied knowing Jesus, his Lord. Could he really think that Cornelius, or anyone else was less deserving of God's love and forgiveness than he himself was, just because of their bloodline?

But Peter also knew the other truth that unites all people. ***“And all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”*** It doesn't matter if you're Jew or Gentile, black or white, male or female, rich or poor, Republican or Democrat. Everyone is in the exact same boat—sinners who, because God doesn't show favoritism, have been forgiven and redeemed through the blood of the Anointed One.

In a lightbulb moment, Peter tells Cornelius's Gentile household, ***“I now realize...that God does not show favoritism.”*** The truth that God wants all people in the world to be saved, and that Jesus had come to save all people wasn't new. It was spoken from the very beginning, reiterated throughout the Old Testament, and confirmed by Jesus himself. It's not like Peter slept through those sessions of God 101. I think he just finally grasped the implications of it. That that room full of Gentiles he was telling about Jesus weren't some separate people group. They were his brothers and sisters. That Jews and Gentiles were no longer Jews and Gentiles. Now they were Christians—one in Christ. And the same is true for us. No matter how different we might be, we are **United by the Anointed.**

While Peter was telling Cornelius's household that shocking truth, God did something even more shocking, ***“While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all those who heard the message.”*** Just like the Holy Spirit had been poured out on Jesus at his baptism; just like the Spirit was poured out on the Apostles at Pentecost; in Cornelius's house that day, Gentiles were also anointed by God, brought into his family, and chosen for a special purpose. They too were called, sent, and empowered to proclaim the good news of Jesus to all nations!

And friends, at your baptism, by water and the Word, the Spirit was also poured out on you in faith. You were made God's own child, anointed and empowered by God to carry out that same purpose—to proclaim the good news of the Savior of all nations, to all nations, and to serve him with our lives.

I want you to look around at the people sitting in this church with you. No matter how different we are, we're all united as brothers and sisters in Christ. And I want you to look at the people around you this week in your workplace, your school, your neighborhood, your grocery store. No matter how different those people are, you're all in the same boat—sinners who deserve no favor from God, but who have been shown the most amazing grace. Love them like Jesus loves them. And

empowered and motivated by the Anointed One, tell them about the only one who truly unites all people.