

June 15 & 16, 2024

---

## The Jesus Way | New

Acts 10:1-7, 34-48

Pastor Paul Dean

---

When my kids were babies and moving to solid food, I decided to make all their baby food for them. Butternut squash, acorn squash, green beans, carrots. I remember feeding my son Jonah carrots for the first time. There he was in his highchair ready to eat... opens his mouth and pop goes in a small spoonful of carrots. Now I'm not sure what he was expecting, but he was not expecting carrots. The look on his face... he looked at us as if we had tried to do permanent damage – and he's never trusted us since.

We have this deep connection with food. Think about grits... think about lefse. Churches in the south own BBQ pits and have communal meals that continue to embed their culture deeper and deeper into their consciousness. Churches in this part of the world have lutefisk dinners. Food ties us back to something deeply human and yet spiritual.

The same thing was true for Peter... Let's talk about Peter... Peter was a first century Jew – a good Jew – a kosher Jew. Everything he ate – everything he touched – every house he entered – every piece of clothing he wore was approved of by his religion. And if anything was out of place – he observed ritual cleansing. Peter was a product of hundreds of years of a minority people who had systematically been oppressed by dozens of empires. Yes, the Jewish people had moments where they were in charge but for most of their existence – the minority oppressed. They were not part of the superpower – they were a part of systems that superpowers used to gain even more power.

It's one of the reasons why we "superpower" Americans must be careful reading scripture because it wasn't written from a superpower's perspective – it was written by a group of former slaves. Whose big bang moment – whose major creation moment was freedom from slavery. But not just freedom from slavery but freedom for something – and that something was to be **distinct**

– to be different – to not be like all the other tribes or nations in the world – so that they would not repeat the mistakes of those who oppressed them – so this new tribe could help bring about God's blessing to the entire world. And nothing could be more distinct than what you ate. Food was gift – specifically a gift from God. And so, a list of food the Jew's could eat and couldn't eat was created – you couldn't be more distinct than what you eat. But at the same time – you can't get more exclusive than what you eat.

I was in the store recently with my wife and we ran into another couple and as we chatted the conversation quickly turned – whole 30 diet plan – keto diet pan – ok – well I guess I'm not coming to your house for the next 30 days. But think about being in community with people and because of what you eat you would never – ever – ever – ever, under the punishment of religious judgment, eat at their house. This was Peter –

Now – place that up against the very last thing that Jesus told his disciples in the Gospel of Matthew – Go and make disciples of all nations... How are you supposed to make disciples of a bunch of people whom you can't even enter their house. How are you supposed to break bread with a bunch of people who have completely different dietary habits and rituals. Something has to give – and it does – God provides a way.

During prayer – Peter has a vision – a sheet – formed like a sack with all kinds of animals in it is lowered down and God says eat. Now in this sack are clean animals and unclean animals and the problem was if anything clean touched what was unclean the clean thing became unclean. What happens with stuff in a sack – everything touches everything.

So, in Peter's mind – the stuff that is clean is now unclean God say eat – and Peter the religious – first century kosher Jew says – no way! Peter says – I've never eaten anything – profane. God says – hey – there is a new vision – there is a new way to see that world and if you are going to be a blessing – the distinction that made you a different people but also made you an exclusive group – a clique –

has got to change – we are about something much bigger now.

Peter is so against it that God has repeat it 3 times – 3 is a holy number. Peter's religion has gotten in the way of God's will. Peter's religious practice – his tradition gets in the way of the new. God is doing a new thing and Peter – whose name means rock – was rock solid against it. Everything that Peter knew – everything that he had been taught. Every biblical scholar of his day– every “right” bible based, bible preaching, bible worshipping rabbi had embedded in his mind, heart and spirit that there was only one way. And here God is blowing it up. In Jesus Christ – God is doing a new thing. The Jesus way is a lot more about inclusion, creating community, building up fellowship in the body of Christ and a lot less about exclusion.

*<sup>17</sup> Now while Peter was greatly puzzled about what to make of the vision that he had seen, suddenly the men sent by Cornelius appeared. On Peter's arrival Cornelius met him, and falling at his feet, worshiped him. <sup>26</sup> But Peter made him get up, saying, “Stand up; I am only a mortal.” <sup>27</sup> And as he talked with him, he went in and found that many had assembled; <sup>28</sup> and he said to them, “You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean. (Act 10:17-28 NRS)*

How does this happen? There is a call – a great commission that goes beyond our rules and regulations. Instead of the human tendency towards distinction and exclusivity, God's call for us is to be distinctively inclusive. But for many of us – how do we begin to see what new thing God is doing? How do we know if God is doing something new in us? Is God making us new?

Winnie the Pooh Quote - *Here is Edward Bear, coming down the stairs now, bump, bump, bump, on the back of his head, behind Christopher Robin. It is, as far as he knows, the only way of coming downstairs, but sometimes he feels that there really is another way, if only he could stop bumping for a moment and think of it. And then he feels that perhaps there isn't.*

God is calling all of us to see how we live in this world, but we don't stop and truly reflect... we will be simply dragged by our feet to thing to thing and before we know it – we are so deeply entrenched in our tradition that we can't see what God is doing anymore. Or we react like Peter and simply refuse.

But the two main characters in this story give us the way to stop bump, bump, bumping on the back of our heads and see what God is making new. And that way is prayer – both Peter and Cornelius come to the other way through prayer –

Two people who should never be together. Two people who should never be in the same company. Two people who should never eat together, through prayer they see the new thing God is doing, not only in the world, but in them. God was making them new.

It was an easy – no. And was it comfortable right away – no. Were they both judged harshly by the folks who considered themselves to be “the real religious ones” – yes.

So did then both come to understand that God was doing a new thing. First, they responded with serious intent to the great commission.

*<sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Mat 28:18-1 NRS)*

How can you respond with serious intent to the great commission? Who can you invite to church with you?

Second open yourself up to your own “Holy Sheet” moment. I don't say that to be provocative – each and every one of us is holding on to a distinction that can or has become exclusionary of others. Just like Peter's vision of a sheet, a Holy Sheet, filled with God's new creation, God has a “Holy Sheet” moment for you too. Pray and stay open because

you'll never know when it will show up. You may find yourself responding like Peter. Opening up your heart, your dining room table, to someone who you never thought would be possible. It's interesting. The one vegetable that my son will eat now – no questions asked – are carrots.

God is about new things – new beginnings – God is making you new.