

010823 Sermon "Call to be Witnesses" Acts 10:34-43

Epiphany is the day Christians remember when the Magi came to visit Jesus with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Scripture tells us that the Magi followed signs revealed in the stars to baby Jesus. The word "epiphany," from the Greek word *epiphania*, means appearance or manifestation, and refers to the manifestation of Jesus Christ to the world. The coming of these visitors was a sign that the incarnation of God in Christ had been made known to the whole world, so even the wise men from the East came to worship him.

In Acts 10:34-43 we read today, Peter's short sermon is recorded. Peter's short sermon to Cornelius' household illustrates how the proclamation of the resurrection can work. In Acts 10:1-2, it is written about Cornelius as follows. "In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort, as it was called. He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God."

One day, when Cornelius was praying at 3pm in the afternoon, he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God who had just come in and said to him, "Cornelius! Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God. Now dispatch some men to Joppa and send for a man named Simon, who is also called Peter."

On the next day, as they were on their way and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about at noon to pray. He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. In it were all kinds of unholy or unclean creatures according to Jewish law. A voice came to him, "Get up, Peter, kill and eat!" But Peter said, 'By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean.' The voice said to him again, a second time, 'What God has made clean, you must not call profane.' This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven. Now while Peter was greatly puzzled about the vision that he had seen, suddenly the men sent by Cornelius appeared. So, Peter met Cornelius, preached the gospel, and baptized him and his family.

This is quite significant because Cornelius was one of the first Gentiles converted to the Christian faith. As I talked about the meaning of the Epiphany in the beginning of the sermon, we see the big picture of God who wants the gospel to be delivered not only to the Jews but also to the Gentiles.

Here's something to think about. In today's story, Cornelius and Peter experienced God's special grace through a vision. However, notice that such grace was accomplished during the time of prayer, as they usually did according to their custom. Usually, people do not pray because they are busy in their daily life. Even if they pray, it's easy to be sporadic depending on their mood. "Today, I'm in a good mood, so I'll pray." "I'm not in a good mood right now, so I can't pray."

Paul said this in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." I want you to pray on a regular basis. Not just at church, but in your daily life. Pray in season or out of season. Setting a time and place to pray is also a good training.

For some people, it may be praying at dawn. I personally receive a lot of answers in the early morning prayer hours and experienced a lot of grace. Also, for some people, it may be as soon as you go to work. For others, it may be when you wake up from bed or right before going to bed. Hopefully, like Peter and Cornelius, I bless you in the name of Jesus Christ to set aside time and pray before God, no matter how busy your schedule is!

In the passage today, Peter is preaching to the gentile Cornelius. Peter himself is thrilled at God's providence. He realized that God does not see people in appearance, but chooses people who fear God. Until then, the Gentiles were severely discriminated against. The Jews were God's chosen people. Sometimes, "chosen" was considered a condition of "superiority". See the Pharisees at the time of Jesus. How arrogant are they?

But do you know what the Bible says about the reason God originally chose Israel to be God's chosen people? Were they good? Smart? According to Deuteronomy 7:7, "The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you

because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples." Here, "the fewest people" means that they are weaker than other peoples. But God said to Israel, "I rejoice over you and have chosen you." God loved them unconditionally. Not because they were good and special, but rather because they were weak and small.

It's easy for people to become arrogant while thinking why they were chosen. 'Because I'm better than others, I'm excellent!' People fall in their callings because they often think like the world. They think that God chose them just as the world picks the best person for the job. They become arrogant. Even if they started humbly, as time goes by, they try to take control.

But the obvious reason the Bible tells us is that we were chosen to be "witnesses" today! The apostle Peter knew it exactly. At the time, the Jews didn't even talk to Gentiles. Still, Peter was standing in front of Cornelius the Gentile (not thinking of himself or acting superior)! He talks about two things. First, God made Jesus as judge, and second, if you believe in Jesus Christ, you will be forgiven. Peter was thrilled to see that even the Gentiles, who at the time were like outsiders, had a place as God's chosen people.

There is something amazing in the Bible today. There is a conflict with God's justice! What is it? That's the part about forgiveness! Now, Peter is preaching the gospel to Cornelius and to his household. He is telling them the gospel of peace began in Galilee. Jesus showed God's grace to anoint the Holy Spirit and power, and the Jews crucified Jesus to death, but God raised him in three days and Jesus was resurrected!

The reason God called and chose Peter as the witness of the Lord from the beginning was to testify to others why Jesus was sent to the world. It was God that made Jesus the judge and that anyone who believed in Jesus would be forgiven. This was the conclusion of Peter's sermon for the Gentile, Cornelius. This is the heart of the Gospel!

Being a judge and a savior at the same time? How can this contradiction be true? We are all sinners who will die before God's justice. How is that possible that Jesus can save us? That is because Jesus, the judge, received the

punishment for the sins that human beings must receive. Because God's law stipulates the consequences of sin as death, Jesus received the punishments that human must receive on the cross on behalf of human.

John 3: 17-18 says, "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

Dear beloved sisters and brothers in Christ, Jesus broke the power of sin and death and gave the authority to become children of God to those who believe in Jesus and want to live according to His Word! As we learn from today's scripture, pray without ceasing and live as witnesses for Christ's resurrection. Fairfield Grace, may God's grace, peace, goodness, and mercy be with you, your family, your business, your studies, and with the lives of your children. Amen.