

“The Preacher”  
 January 8, 2016  
 First Sunday after Epiphany  
 Text: Acts 10:34-43

Island Heights UMC, Island Heights, NJ

*Then Peter began to speak to them: "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.*

*You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ--he is Lord of all.*

*That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.*

*We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.*

*He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead.*

*All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."*

#### Peter at the House of Cornelius

Peter. This morning Bill read from the Book of Acts, chapter 10. It's a passage about Peter. Some background: Peter is in Caesarea, and he is at the house of Cornelius. But why is he there? Cornelius is a Gentile. Peter, a Jew, is not supposed to be there. Who is Cornelius? The beginning of Acts chapter 10 tells us:

*In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Roman 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. Acts 10:1-2*

A Roman centurion; meaning he has command over 100 Roman soldiers. But he is a God-fearer.

Who is Peter? The head-strong disciple; the one-time Christ denier; the forgiven; and now the commissioned. Once a fisherman, but today a preacher in the house of a Gentile. What does it mean for him to be in this house? He is a Jew. You must know what happened when he was praying up on a roof in Joppa three days prior. He has a vision of a sheet coming down from heaven with all kinds of animals and a voice that said, "Get up Peter, kill and eat."

“No, not I. I will not eat anything that is profane or unclean.”

But then a voice in response: “What God has made clean, you must not call profane.”

Meanwhile, at the same time in Caesarea, Cornelius is having his own vision of an angel of the Lord who told him to send men to Joppa to get Peter and bring him to his house. This is how Peter ends up in Caesarea in the house of Cornelius.

It’s a whole new world, and Peter is now being sent to places he would never have gone. God is moving out of the confines of Israel; the Spirit is moving outside of the proverbial box. Are you willing to go into places you don’t believe you belong? To say things you have never said before? You are going to need the Holy Spirit for that to happen.

#### The Preacher

So, now, Cornelius, all of his family, all his friends, and all his soldiers; all of them looking at Peter.

*Then Peter begins to speak to them. Actually, he begins to preach:*

*“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.*

(Ahh, *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*) Peter had a listening audience in the house of Cornelius, a man who feared God; but there is more to the story. Peter continues:

*You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ--he is Lord of all.*

*That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.*

(Ahh. *The Lordship of Jesus; it begins with baptism—Jesus’ baptism, our baptism.* The baptism of water and the Spirit. see Matthew 3:13-17) But then Peter gets to the point:

*We are **witnesses** to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.*

Peter the witness. Peter the preacher. Peter the bringer of good news. One time a fisherman, but now, like Jesus had prophetically said to him, he is a fisher of men.

#### Can I Get a Witness?

Witnesses. We are called to be witnesses. Do you know what it means to be a witness? To attest to the fact of the resurrection, to tell the world he rose from the dead. “Can I get a witness?” You know that old Pentecostal tradition of the preacher calling out to the congregation, “Can I get a witness?!” to which the congregation responds “Amen!” Let me tell you what is happening in Cuba. I was there a year ago and saw how the Holy Spirit is spreading all through that island nation, and the Methodist Church is on the front lines of this revival. I had the opportunity to preach there through a

translator. And the name of that sermon was “Can I Get a Witness?” They did not need much prompting. The church was packed out with people hungry for the good news of Jesus, and when asked “Can I get a witness?” they kept coming back every time with a resounding “Amen!”

To be a witness. It’s the mission of the disciples. Peter preaches:

*He commanded us to **preach** to the people and to **testify** that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead.*

*All the **prophets testify** about him that **everyone** who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”*

This is the good news. that salvation through Jesus Christ is available to all, at any time. It’s a gift; the grace of God; even to the Gentiles.

What happens when the House of Cornelius hears the good news? Acts 10:44-48:

*“While Peter is still speaking the Holy Spirit falls on all who hear the word... So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited them to stay for several days.”*

### The Mission

So this is our mission. We are called to testify to the good news of Jesus Christ. Are you ready to testify? To give witness to your faith? To explain forgiveness of sins simply through the name of Jesus?

What, for you, is the single most important thing about Jesus to tell someone? How do *you* experience the reality of Jesus Christ, and what will you say to someone about him?

Now, make no mistake, we are going to need the Holy Spirit. No one can testify to the resurrection of Jesus Christ without the Spirit. Are you filled with that Spirit? Fear not, Jesus said I will never leave you nor forsake you. I will be with you all the way to the end, he says. This is what it means to have the Holy Spirit within us. This is how we are empowered. And are you prepared then, to go, like Peter, to unlikely places to share this good news? An unlikely place could be some far away place where you don’t even speak the language; or it could be as close as the next person you meet in the line at the store.

So here at the beginning of a new year I encourage you to be filled with the Holy Spirit and preach the good news of Jesus Christ. And we all preach in our own ways. Hear this: preaching is not just done by the pastor! It’s how we live. It’s how we interact with other people. It’s how we teach our children. It’s how we behave on social media when everyone is looking. It’s also how we conduct ourselves when no one is looking. In all we do and say we must ask, “Are we preaching the good news?”

To be a disciple of Jesus Christ is costly and carries a heavy responsibility. The gift of salvation is free and comes by way of the Spirit, but then we are called to respond in light of that gift, and the world is watching as it waits for the only antidote to what ails it. We carry the antidote, and at times we will carry it to unlikely places. But we, *all* of us, like Peter, are called to preach it. Amen.