

To me, it is one of the most compelling stories in the Bible. You see Peter--a first century Jew, bound by first century customs--finds himself moving beyond the pale of his day and time into a new way of being. For those of you who do not know this story-- of which we hear only the tale end in our reading from Acts--during some roof-top prayer, Peter had fallen into a trance. A sheet with all sorts of creatures drops down from heaven. The animals were considered unclean under Jewish dietary laws, but he is commanded by the Lord to kill and eat them. Peter protests that he has never eaten what is unclean, only to be told that what the Lord has created clean must not be called profane. This happened three times and as Peter is struggling to figure out what it all meant, he looks down from the roof to see three men who are looking for him. The Holy Spirit advises him that he is to go with them. The men have come on behalf of a centurion from Caesarea who had been told in a dream to send for Peter.

Peter does indeed go. When he arrives he gives a sort of snotty speech, "You must know, he says, that I am a Jew and you are Gentiles and that I am forbidden by Law and custom from having anything to do with the likes of you -- but I had a dream telling me that I should not call profane and unclean what God has created clean -- so what do you want?"

Cornelius tells him his own experience and his own dream and the lights go on and the bells ring for Peter. He gets it. He really gets it. Our reading picks up there with Peter's witness to the Risen Lord. I am convinced, he says, that God shows no partiality . . .

But what has all this to do with THE most compelling story in the Bible? The Story of Jesus of Nazareth, a Jewish Peasant who preached God's kingdom come, who healed the sick, cast out demons, fed the hungry, and defied both religious and secular authority -- with the man who was crucified, died and was buried only to be risen three days later? What has all this to do with Easter?

Everything.

Easter is not just a story about how God gives us life eternal in the sweet by and by, nor is it primarily a story to comfort us with the thought of meeting our loved ones again in heaven after we die – though it does both of those things. Rather, Easter is the story of how God's love shatters every boundary real and imagined, making peace and wholeness wherever it goes. You see, when God raised Jesus from the dead, he not only proved that life and love ultimately win, but he freed Jesus to move beyond his life in that day and that time, to move in all days and all times, bringing with him the power of his life and love – beyond his friends and family, beyond his disciples, beyond the Jews, beyond the gentiles – to the world—the universe – every nook and cranny of it.

No boundaries. Real or imagined. No class, racial, national, religious boundaries. No boundaries between friend and enemy, nor high and low, no boundaries between sinner and saint, male and female, slave and free. No boundaries between the living and the dead. Nothing will separate us or the world from the reconciling, redeeming, restoring love of God in Christ. Nothing, ultimately to prevent the peace and wholeness of God's Kingdom from ruling not just in our hearts but in the world.

What Peter begins to realize is that the power of Christ's resurrection has no limits in his own life as well. That is moves him beyond his own limits, his own boundaries to people and places and situations he never dared go. In fact his life is hidden; now it is Christ's life -- as the writer of Colossians reminds us – embedded as it were in a life and purpose larger and more powerful than his own.

Peter the fisherman becomes an apostle taking Christ's love wherever he goes. He takes that love to people he never cared for – like Cornelius. Cornelius, I am sure, is experiencing a similar thing -- though he has no name for it until now. He experiences a nudge to reach out to Peter. Cornelius is a man of power and wealth, a Roman citizen and yet he feels compelled to ask a lowly born Jew for help – unheard of!

In Jesus, in his life and in his suffering with us and for us, God speaks the word of peace and forgiveness that saves. In his resurrection that word continues on, working in us reconciliation and inviting us beyond every barrier internal and external to be that peace for each other and the world.

This is the power of the resurrection – it is the power of a hard won peace, a peace born of suffering with and for, a peace born of sacrifice and love – a peace that passes all understanding and imagining, and a peace that calls, invites, nudges and prods us to live into the immensity of that life and love for the world.

Through our Risen Lord every barrier to living that peace has been removed; there is nothing to hold us back. Today, like Peter and like Cornelius, may you know that life and love, and may you be moved beyond your own barriers and boundaries to bring the peace of God to all you encounter. May you, like Peter and like Cornelius, witness to the power of the resurrected Lord.

Happy Easter.