

Today our second lesson was from the book of Acts. This reading is actually read annually in the Episcopal Church on a different occasion. It is always the one of the readings for Easter Sunday every year. So why is it assigned today for the First Sunday after the Epiphany in Year A of our 3-year cycle of reading? What does this Easter reading have to do with Epiphany?

I actually talked about this reading in an Easter context last Spring when we were reading through the book of Acts.¹ Just a quick recap.

This reading is a mini sermon from St. Peter. It is the 3rd of 3 great turning points or hinge points in the middle of the Book of Acts.

Chapter 8 tells the story of Deacon Philip baptizing a Ethiopian Eunuch, making him the first non-Jewish Christian.

Chapter 9 is the familiar story of the conversion of Paul on the Road to Damascus. Paul will become the great apostle and missionary to the non-Jewish world.

And chapter 10 tells the story of Cornelius the Roman Centurion and his conversion.

In the run-up to today's reading in Acts, there are parallel accounts of Centurion Cornelius and St. Peter.

First, God sends Cornelius a vision. He's told to send some men 30 miles south to fetch Simon Peter in Joppa, modern day Tel Aviv, and to invite Peter to come visit him. Cornelius doesn't know why. But he complies.

God also sends Peter a vision. Peter sees a large linen picnic blanket being lowered from heaven. In the middle of the sheet are all sorts of animals, some which are kosher, and others which aren't. Peter hears a voice that says, "Kill and eat."² 'Have some bacon, shrimp and catfish.'

Peter objects—'I've never broken Jewish dietary laws.' Why should I start now?

But God replies, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane."³

Then, while Peter is still confused by the vision, the men from Cornelius show up. Peter is told that these men were sent by God. They tell Peter about Cornelius and his vision. Peter invites them to spend the night.

Then the next day, Peter and the men head back to Caesarea. Peter meets Cornelius and they compare notes and share their visions with each other. Actually, Peter says something

¹ See <http://stpaulslubbock.org/pdf/2019/Easter%204C%2005%2012%202019.pdf>

² Acts 10:13

³ Acts 10:15

quite remarkable: "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."⁴

There's a real shift here. God gave Peter a vision of clean and unclean foods. But Peter has interpreted it to mean clean or unclean people. Peter is no longer going to put himself in the place of God. He's no longer going to be the one to judge others, whether they're profane or unclean. That's up to God, not him.

And he emphasizes that in a mini-sermon which is our lesson for today. Peter starts out by saying, "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."⁵ In other words, all the ethnic and cultural distinctions Peter used to make now belong in the past. The Good News of Jesus is for people of all tribes and languages and nations. Jesus is Lord of all.

Then Peter proclaims the death and resurrection of Jesus, which is why we read this passage every year on Easter Sunday. But Peter puts Jesus' death and resurrection in the context of his entire ministry beginning with his Baptism.

Baptism. Ding, ding, ding. That's why we're reading it today, on the first Sunday of Epiphany, the Sunday every year when we celebrate Jesus' baptism.

But there's also a larger Epiphany theme here.

Epiphany literally means something that's "shining forth," something that's "being revealed."

During the season of Epiphany we celebrate the ways that Jesus shines forth and is made known in the world.

{{8:00—At the 10:30 service we will sing a hymn that mentions many of these different Epiphanies, different ways Jesus is made manifest, different ways Jesus is revealed in the world.}}

{{10:30—Our opening hymn⁶ this morning cited many of these different Epiphanies, different ways Jesus is made manifest, different ways Jesus is revealed in the world.}}

He is first made known by the star to the Wisemen.

Then Jesus is then made manifest at his baptism in the waters of the Jordan. God says, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."⁷

⁴ Acts 10:28

⁵ Acts 10:34-35

⁶ Hymn 135

⁷ Mt 3:17

His nature is revealed and made known in his healing and his teaching ministry.

And at the end of the season of Epiphany, he is made known on the mountain of Transfiguration. And afterwards, he makes his way to Jerusalem. And there Jesus will take up his cross. This is also a way in which his glory will be manifested. And Jesus will burst forth from the tomb. This also is a way his glory will be revealed to the world.

This is also Peter's proclamation in Acts today. Peter summarizes the message God is sending through Jesus Christ. Peter begins by saying Jesus is "Lord of all." Jesus is not just sent to bring good news to one particular group of people, but to all the peoples of the earth.

Peter talks about Jesus' baptism by John. He talks about Jesus ministering and doing good and bringing healing.

Peter then talks about how Jesus was put to death on a cross. But that didn't stop God. God raised Jesus from death on the third day, and he appeared to his followers, and ate and drank with him. He wasn't a ghost or a spirit, in other words. He was raised with some sort of physical body.

And then, Peter says, that Jesus commanded his followers to go out and preach to the people and share the Good News of what happened. They have received all of these Epiphanies of who Jesus is and how God was working through him and was present in him.

And now, they are to go out and share these things with all people, to make Jesus known, to manifest him and reveal him yet again.

And this is not just for the Jewish people. It is for all people. Peter says, "Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."⁸

Jesus is Lord of all.

That's a huge turning point in the book of Acts. It's a hugely important message Peter is preaching.

And what I love about it is that Peter doesn't connect all the dots at first. It takes Peter a number of stages. And I find that so comforting.

Remember, Peter ran around with Jesus. He was not only a disciple but part of the inner circle of disciples. Peter heard Jesus' teaching firsthand. He saw Jesus' miracles. Peter ate and drank with Jesus at parties. Peter ate and drank with Jesus at the Last Supper. As he shares today, Peter ate and drank with Jesus after the Resurrection.

Peter was sent out to share Jesus' teaching and the events of his life with others, and he did so faithfully.

⁸ Acts 10:43

And yet, even with all of this going for him, it takes further revelations from God before Peter connects the dots. It takes God sending a vision of a sheet of clean and unclean animals coupled with emissaries sent from Cornelius and then undertaking a long day's journey back to Cornelius's house.

It takes all of these things for Peter to have a spiritual "aha" moment. In spite of all he's seen, his vision and understanding are not perfect. God still works on him and God still works with him. Peter still has room to grow in his understanding of what the Good News is all about.

It takes the combination of all of these things for Peter to realize that not only is Jesus Lord, but that Jesus is truly Lord of all. Jesus is Lord of **all** people, all nationalities and ethnicities and cultures.

We're now living in the year 2020. But do we always have 20/20 vision? Do we always see everything clearly?

Or are we still learning? Are we still trying to improve? Is there room for spiritual growth in our lives?

Are we open to what God is doing? Is there room for us to have spiritual "aha" moments, for God to take us further, to mold and fashion us more and more into the people he wants us to be?

I hope that we can be like Peter. I hope that we can be open to seeing God at work in our world and at work in our lives.

Jesus is Lord of all.

I've been a priest now for 24 years. I've spent a large chunk of my life both before and after ordination trying following Jesus and to proclaiming and sharing the Good News that he is Lord of all. And yet, I also know that I haven't arrived yet.

I've spent countless hours in formal and informal study about Jesus, countless hours in prayer. Yet I know that I haven't arrived yet. There are still things for me to learn. There are still things that God needs to teach me.

That's what I love about Peter in this story. He is open to learning more and growing. I know I need to do the same.

If you still need New Years' resolutions, you might think about these.

In the year 2020, seek clearer 20/20 spiritual vision.

This year, be open to seeing things as God would have us see them.

This year, be open to growing more fully into the person God has created you to be.