

Act of Acceptance

Acts of Hope: Part 4 “Act of Acceptance”

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – May 1, 2022

5th Sunday of Easter

Readings: Acts 11:1-18

Reflection: Psalm 148

Greeting: Surely God is my salvation. I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord is my strength and my song. He has become my salvation. Praise the Lord! (*Isaiah 12:2*)

Prayer: Almighty God, through your only Son you overcame death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life. Grant that we who celebrate our Lord’s resurrection, by the renewing of your Spirit, arise from the death of sin to the life of righteousness; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 148

Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise him in the heights! Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his host! Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars! Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the heavens! Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he commanded and they were created. He established them forever and ever; he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed. Praise the LORD from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling his command! Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars! Wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds! Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth! Young men and women alike, old and young together! Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his glory is above earth and heaven. He has raised up a horn for his people, praise for all his faithful, for the people of Israel who are close to him. Praise the LORD! (Psalm 148 NRSVue)*

We read the words of Psalm 148 and hear of praise and celebration of the Lord. That all creation praise God for his wondrous deeds. That God is exalted above all. How do you praise God in your daily life? What do you give thanks to the Lord for? What is something new that God is showing you today? How can you share in your praise with those around you? How do we share in the joy of our Risen Savior?

Prayer: O God, our shepherd, our gate, and our lamb: In the resurrection of your Son you have brought us into your pasture. Guide us to your clear streams, and tame the wolf at our gate. Help us with our doubts and fears and strengthen us in love as we come before you in prayer. May you guide us in all things; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Alleluia.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture reading for today comes from the Common English Bible. Our reading for today comes from Acts chapter 11 verses 1 through 18.

The apostles and the brothers and sisters throughout Judea heard that even the Gentiles had welcomed God's word. When Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him. They accused him, "You went into the home of the uncircumcised and ate with them!" Step-by-step, Peter explained what had happened. "I was in the city of Joppa praying when I had a visionary experience. In my vision, I saw something like a large linen sheet being lowered from heaven by its four corners. It came all the way down to me. As I stared at it, wondering what it was, I saw four-legged animals—including wild beasts—as well as reptiles and wild birds. I heard a voice say, 'Get up, Peter! Kill and eat!' I responded, 'Absolutely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' The voice from heaven spoke a second time, 'Never consider unclean what God has made pure.' This happened three times, then everything was pulled back into heaven. At that moment three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea arrived at the house where we were staying. The Spirit told me to go with them even though they were Gentiles. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered that man's house. He reported to us how he had seen an angel standing in his house and saying, 'Send to Joppa and summon Simon, who is known as Peter. He will tell you how you and your entire household can be saved.' When I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them, just as the Spirit fell on us in the beginning. I remembered the Lord's words: 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' If God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, then who am I? Could I stand in God's way?" Once the apostles and other believers heard this, they calmed down. They praised God and concluded, "So then God has enabled Gentiles to change their hearts and lives so that they might have new life." (Acts 11:1-18 CEB+)

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

I wanted to note that if you're wanting a fuller story about Peter's vision and his encounter that he summarizes in our reading today, you can find it in Acts chapter 10. But for our purposes here, it helps to have Peter's retelling. In our reading today, Peter discovers something unexpected. And he has to share that vision with others because he wants them to understand the experience that he has gone through and this new acceptance that he has because of the way that God has acted in his life.

Peter begins his retelling with a vision in which he is shown many different animals and he's told to kill and eat. But Peter doesn't want to. He sees this as something horrible, something terrible. He responds that he will not eat. Nothing unclean has ever entered Peter's mouth and so he refuses. But the voice says something Peter wasn't expecting. That he shouldn't consider something to be unclean if God has made it pure. In a way Peter is being chastised. Who are you, Peter, to declare what God can make clean and unclean? Now when the vision departs, Peter starts to understand why he had the vision because three men come to see him. And the Spirit tells him to go with them, even though they're Gentiles. And Peter is beginning to take this lesson seriously. These people need him, so he goes. When they get to the man's house, they're informed that an angel had appeared before him. The angel said to go get Peter so that Peter could tell him how to be saved. That was the reason he had sent for Peter. He wants his entire household to be saved. He's yearning for that experience. He's yearning for salvation. So, he called for Peter and now Peter is here.

Now I pause here to note the importance of that vision Peter had. In all likelihood, Peter would have refused to go. Why would Peter have refused? Because he'd be going amongst people who were uncircumcised. He'd be among Gentiles. He'd be going outside of the Israelites. He'd be going outside the chosen people. But Peter did have the vision and he listened to it. He accepted this new thing and when he goes something big happens. Peter begins to speak, and the Holy Spirit descends, just like it fell on him in the beginning. I can only imagine his astonishment his wonder at this sight. These outsiders, these Gentiles, these uncircumcised receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. The same thing that came upon Christ's own disciples. And then he remembers the Lord's words: John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. And Peter makes a really big concession here. He accepts these outsiders. And it's not without some controversy. Because the context for the story that Peter is telling is to try to explain all of this to the circumcised believers. Because Peter is being accused of doing something he shouldn't have done. That context helps to make the story even more interesting now because it means Peter is up there defending his actions.

Peter is having to defend this act of evangelism, this act of grace, because they are accusing him of eating with the Gentiles, with the uncircumcised. In essence they are saying that Peter is going where he doesn't belong because that's not God's chosen people. They aren't circumcised. They aren't under the law. They don't belong. And in essence, saying Peter is going against God by going to these people. Now that's a heavy thing. Imagine somebody telling you that you're out of line because the people you're going and eating with are not worthy to be reached out to. You are breaking your oath to God by going and being with those people. One might even see that you are giving up your seat at the table to go and eat with those people because you'll no longer be welcome among God's chosen. Opinions begin to change once they hear Peter's story. Once Peter bears witness to his experience of seeing God's grace and seeing God's love in action, Peter changes hearts and minds. I use that phrasing for a reason, because once the apostles and the other believers there in Jerusalem

have heard all of what Peter has to say, they praise God and conclude that God has enabled Gentiles to change their hearts and lives so that they may have new life. And I have to wonder if they actually understood the subtle irony of the fact that they had just had their own hearts in lives changed by Peter's witness. Because up until that point they seem ready to throw Peter out the door.

Peter's explanation shows God is out there reaching out to the Gentiles, and in turn shows that they need to be reaching out to the Gentiles. God's plan seems to be much bigger than they had anticipated, so they have to change their own actions in response. Peter's act of acceptance shows that he was willing to listen, and he was willing to change. That Christ could still reach in and change his heart and mind even though he had already been turned to Christ. He was devoting his life to sharing the good news. But Peter learns there is still more for him to learn and that he must still be willing to have his heart and his life changed. He has to be willing to broaden his horizons and expand his outlook, because God isn't thinking small. Peter's act of witness changes the hearts and minds of all of those apostles and disciples, all of those believers in Jerusalem, to say that they may have been convinced one way, but God has shown Peter something new. And they could have rejected it. They could have rejected Peter by pointing out why it was wrong. "Say what you say, but it says right here in Scripture that it is wrong. That's not allowed Peter. You don't get to make up the rules as you go." But they didn't, because Peter convinced them.

Peter's witness of the way that the Holy Spirit descended upon them, even though they were uncircumcised, informs them that they were wrong. That maybe what they believed were the limits to God's love were not the limits to God's love. That where they thought God's grace ended it did not end. And where they thought the letter of the law would triumph, they have the voice of the vision saying, "Never consider unclean what God has made pure." That's the image I want to leave you with today. I want to leave you with the image of Peter making his case for grace and love in his witness through Christ. The way that he saw the Holy Spirit move that moved him. That we hear and we may all reflect on how boundless God's love and grace are and how unending his mercy is, that our hearts and lives to may be changed through Peter's act of acceptance. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Acts of Hope

Our current series will be looking at the Acts of the Apostles during the Easter season, with each week bringing a new act for us to look at.

April 24th – Act of Witness – Acts 5:17-32

May 1st – Act of Change – Acts 9:1-20

May 8th – Motherly Act – Acts 9:36-43

May 15th – Act of Acceptance – Acts 11:1-18

May 22nd – Called to Act – Acts 16:9-15

May 29th – Unexpected Act – Acts 16:16-34

June 5th – Act of the Spirit – Acts 2:1-21

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup Ambulance Crew		Angie Veach	Eric Veach
Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney
Nancy Hoke	Don Wells	Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart
Ronnie Winstead	Dwight Parsons	Lauren Stewart	Phyllis Gable
Sage Martin	Dalton McFarland	Ruth Ann Finley	Jodie Bunch
Tom Finley	Laura Carlen	Judy McCellan	Rosie Chancellor
Susie Callahan	Kenny Holmes	Ted Marrs	Darrell Quick
Chuck Hogan	Brittany Gilbert	Mammoser Family	Family of Albert White
Gary Pearce	Neal Ryan Family	Jackie Potter	
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd
Leo Smith	Bonnie Hite	Sue & Bob Smyser	Larry Thompson
Greg Williams	Family of Eloise Buffenmeyer	Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter
Paul Schulte			

Rev Camron D St. Michael

<https://stmichael.pw>

cdstmichael@outlook.com

(316)530-3182 (call or text)

PO Box 54, Charleston IL, 61920

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