

**Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church**  
**Reverend Dr. Daris Bultena**

**May 2, 2010**  
**5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter**

**Acts 11:1-18**

1Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God. 2So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him, 3saying, "Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?" 4Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step, saying, 5"I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. There was something like a large sheet coming down from heaven, being lowered by its four corners; and it came close to me. 6As I looked at it closely I saw four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air. 7I also heard a voice saying to me, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat.' 8But I replied, 'By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' 9But a second time the voice answered from heaven, 'What God has made clean, you must not call profane.' 10This happened three times; then everything was pulled up again to heaven. 11At that very moment three men, sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were. 12The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. 13He told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, 'Send to Joppa and bring Simon, who is called Peter; 14he will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved.' 15And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. 16And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' 17If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?" 18When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, "Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life."

**John 13:31-35**

31When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. 32If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. 33Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' 34I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. 35By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

## **“Just Pass It On”**

**I was standing outside having a conversation with a parent of a child in one of our afternoon programs. It was the end of the day and I had to silently remind myself that once a parent picks up and signs out a child that child is no longer in our care. That child is in the care of the parent.**

**While I was in conversation I had to keep reminding myself of that. I had to remind myself of that because from where I was standing I could see yet another parent and their child. That other parent had signed his child out and evidently the kid was not ready go and so her dad let her play out there on the playground.**

**He was watching her, but was he really watching her? Was he seeing what I was seeing? I had to keep saying to myself, “Once a parent signs a child out, that child is no longer in our care.” My conversation finished and I continued to stand there. I know I was staring at the situation but I could not help it.**

**Understand that when kids play on the playground they get really dirty. The base of our playground is covered in tire mulch. It is, literally, ground up old tires turned into mulch sized pieces. Should a child fall off a piece of play equipment, the tire mulch is an ideal cushion. It is the safest option out there. That is the upside. The downside is it is dirty.**

**On warmer days, when the kids sweat, they end up blackened. So I had to keep reminding myself that her dad was just a few feet away from her, and once he signed her out she was no longer in the care of our program. Surely he could see what I was seeing.**

**There she was right there in the playground. Visibly dirty she stood there with her hand up to her face. She was licking her hand. She was cleaning it with her tongue! He had to see her. She was licking the dirt and tire residue off her hands.**

**Come on dad—what’s the deal? Are you going to just let her stand there and lick the dirt off her hands?**

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**Once he returned to be with the others there was clear concern about Peter’s having eaten with those who have unclean hands and who consume unclean food. This had been one of the clear criticisms of Jesus too. The observance of kosher in both food and food preparation.**

**To eat that which was unclean was against the understanding of Jewish law. The issue was larger than what one would eat and who one would eat with. Peter understood that and he understood it because of this clear vision that he had been given by God.**

**The larger issue was who was included in the covenant. The larger issue had to deal with the question of the gospel of Jesus Christ and how that related to the gentiles. Did they fit? How were they to come into the faith?**

**Peter has this vision in Joppa that makes it clear to him. A sheet with all kinds of animals on it. Kill and eat is the message. Peter says no. God says what I have made is good. Now do it. And Peter comprehends clearly what he is to learn from this vision. Cornelius and his family are included. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ cover them too.**

**And bigger than that—this truth that “Christ had died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.” That truth was for everyone. There is no limiting who that truth is for. It is for everyone. Jews and gentiles alike—all are included in the covenant of Christ.**

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**Everything has shifted. The world has drastically changed. It has, but those changes are even larger here in our culture. Our cultural context**

is radically different from what it once was. Not long ago there was an alignment of church with culture—it was the time where we could talk about America being a Christian nation.

It does not take long for Alice to wake up in Wonderland and realize that we do not live in a Christian nation. Seemingly, the ground has shifted beneath us, and the church has been pushed to the sidelines of our culture. The reality of it is there is a clear separation between church and state, and in this new world we find that the culture is apathetic and sometimes outright antagonistic of the church.

This change has happened fast and it has happened without a clear-cut passageway for us as the church. The future is unclear and we often wonder about how all this took place. How did we get here? And now that we are here, we know there will never be any getting back there to where we were, but where do we go and what do we do?

How do we present the gospel of Jesus Christ in a way this culture can hear it? How do we present the gospel of Jesus Christ in a way that it changes lives and enables people to grow in God's love?

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“Little children,” Jesus says to them in the Gospel of John. It is a term of endearment. Not colleagues or associates—this is a term of endearment. Jesus speaks it to them. The scene is John's version of the Last Supper. He has washed their feet. Judas has just gone out to do what it is he does.

It is in that moment—in that significant space in time when Jesus says, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

**It is not so much that it is a new commandment as it is a new way for the disciples to conduct and orient their whole world. Their lives are to be oriented not by success or feeling good or things or accomplishments. Their lives are to be oriented by love. Love is what is real. Love is what is really real.**

**This is the mark of Jesus' life with them. Love. Anything else is not real. Love is the center. Love is the key. Love is the compass that shows them they are moving in the direction they are supposed to be moving. It is all about love. From the very moment of creation it had been and now that was all focused in Christ. It was and is all about love.**

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**Strategic planning. That is what we need in order to present the gospel in this context and in this time. Strategic planning and the setting of five-year goals— isn't that what we need? There was a time when we thought that basic business model somehow translated into growth in the church.**

**Those things—strategic planning and the setting of five-year goals— those things just do not have the hold they once did. Now we are dealing with rapid, irregular, and immense change. Rather than strategic and long-range, planning is now a matter of just-in-time. It is just-in-time planning that we do now.**

**But it is not about planning. Planning is not what changes lives and grows God's love. It is not planning. You know what it is. It is the only thing that is really real. It is love. Love. As we pass that on we are passing on the presence of Christ in this age. As we become the reality of love in this world that is when the Church gets it—it is when we get it right.**

**It is all about love. And it always was. And it needs to be the center...to be the motivation...to be spark that gets the fire going. Love.**

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**God's love had no limits. That was what Peter's vision was about. It was not about that which was ritually clean and that which was ritually unclean. It was not even about being Jews or being gentiles. That was not the real issue. The real issue was this holy, perfect, incredible love of God.**

**That love had and has no boundaries. It was for Peter in Jerusalem, and there in Joppa it was also for Cornelius and his household too. There was no stopping that love of God. It extended beyond Jerusalem even to Joppa.**

**There is no limit, no boundary, no stopping this love of God. It extends here to this Joppa. The love of God is here and beyond us here. We are called into this love that is so past where they drew the limits then and where we draw the limits in our lives now.**

**God gave that vision of boundless love to Peter. God is giving you that vision today. God is giving us that vision now—that God's love has no limit; it has no boundary at all. God is giving that vision to us as the church—love, love, love ...no limitations... love, love, love...just pass it on.**

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**He just watched. He stood out there in the midst of all her running and jumping and falling into the tire mulch—he just watched as she rebounded and was licking the dirt off her hands.**

**There was that part of me that wanted to discipline...I wanted to call her back from the encounter with the dirty mulch.**

**But he, her dad, said nothing. How could he say nothing? What is with that?**

**Then I looked right to him. I noticed. I noticed his look. He had on his face the look of absolute delight. He had on his face the look of pure joy.**

**Was he seeing what I was seeing? Hmm... Yes he was.**

**Was he seeing what I was seeing? Hmm... Maybe, just maybe I needed to see what he was seeing. He was seeing this as a moment when she was in absolute delight—she was gleeful, playful, and yes dirty too—but oh was she having a ball out there with all her frolics and activities.**

**What if—what if—we saw the world that way? What if we saw the world as not a place to correct, but as a place to love? What if that love defined our reality—what if allowing that love to BE and passing that love on was how we saw everything? What if we not only saw it that way but lived it that way?**

**What if God sees us that way?**

**What if God sends us into the world to live like that?**

**Amen.**