

# SERMON FOR APRIL 28, 2013

The First Chinese Church of Christ in Hawai'i (UCC)  
**5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter**

7:45 & 10:30 Worship Services

Scripture: **Acts 11:1-18 (Focus); John 1:31-35**

Message: **"Easter 5: When the Spirit Leads,  
We are to Follow in Aloha!"**

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Pics of Peter

## **Gathering in the Word**

There are moments and important and significant times in all of our lives—and these are the stories we share with others. Some of these moments are stories of where our family came from or what part of China or Asia; or how you met your spouse (wife or husband); or the birth of your children or grandchildren; or the time you were in the hospital facing a life-threatening sickness; as well as when you experienced the holy in a life-transforming way!

- ✓ How many of you were here when Pearl Harbor was bombed—that started World War II?
- ✓ How many remember the day President John Kennedy was shot and saw it on TV?
- ✓ How many remember 9-11 and seeing all the buildings fall down in New York City?

This is what our focus Scripture from Acts 11 is about as well as Luke-Acts:

## **Hearing the Word**

### **Acts 11:1-18 (NIV 2011)**

#### *Peter Explains His Actions*

11 <sup>1</sup>The apostles and the believers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of GOD. <sup>2</sup> So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him <sup>3</sup> and said, “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.”

<sup>4</sup> Starting from the beginning, Peter told them the whole

story: <sup>5</sup> “I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. <sup>6</sup> I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles and birds. <sup>7</sup> Then I heard a voice telling me, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’ <sup>8</sup> “I replied, ‘Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’

<sup>9</sup> “The voice spoke from heaven a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that GOD has made clean.’ <sup>10</sup> **This happened three times**, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again.

<sup>11</sup> “Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying.

<sup>12</sup> The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man’s house. <sup>13</sup> He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, ‘Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. <sup>14</sup> He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.’

<sup>15</sup> “As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. <sup>16</sup> Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ <sup>17</sup> So if GOD gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in GOD’s way?”

<sup>18</sup> When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised GOD, saying, “So then, even to Gentiles GOD has granted repentance that leads to life.”

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So Peter is ‘called-on-the-carpet’ for what took place in Acts 10; and is put on the defensive for hanging out and eating (non kosher) at table with Gentile people in their homes! Peter’s fellow Jews’ voices choked up in disbelief and astonishment that he would break the tradition of their elders and not keep kosher (*of food, or premises in which food is sold, cooked, or eaten; satisfying the requirements of Jewish law; <http://www.koshercertification.org.uk/whatdoe.html>*). So Peter explains the whole situation and then concluded with a ‘show-stopper-of-a-line’, “*I did not want to be found opposing God!*” (verse 17). The unstated implication of Peter’s response in verse 17 was that whereas **he** (Peter) has no intention of opposing GOD . . . the rest of the folks were free to do otherwise.

What Peter was saying was—“Go ahead! Oppose GOD if you want to but as for me . . . I think I’ll just stick with the program GOD is running and trust GOD to get it right!”

**This is kind of funny! It highlights just that GOD’s grace is active in the world through a very busy Holy Spirit!**

Note the use of the pronoun “you.” Yes, Peter remembered that Jesus had said “**you** will be baptized

with the Holy Spirit,” and that was a perfectly good thing for Peter and the other disciples to hear so long as the “you” in question was really **“us.”** How fitting that good people like Peter, James, John, Matthew and the rest would get baptized by the Holy Spirit. And so long as the Spirit restricted itself to good upstanding Jews like themselves—then the importance of Jesus’ words about the Spirit and “you” would remain uncontroversial and unsurprising.

So what happens here in our story? The Holy Spirit came on people who were **not** just like us! So yes—Peter remembered Jesus’ words but he didn’t totally understand that the **“you”** in the coming and falling of the Spirit would even be on Gentiles! This means that for Peter Jesus words had never been meant to be restricted to that local club (Jews only)—and **that** is what Peter had not understood up until that very moment when he was confronted with this surprising work of God in scooping up even Gentiles into the divine embrace of the Spirit and of Gospel grace!

Acts 11 ends up with the naysayers and disbelievers who were criticizing him—being as convicted of GOD’s action. We are told that they all praised GOD for the very thing that only a few verses earlier had had them hopping mad and angry!

Our Gospel is relentless—sisters and brothers—and the Gospel will never stop pushing us out of our boxes or in

new and different directions that Spirit moves us—even here at our TFCCCH!

The surprise of the Gospel of us is always that its grace is ever new and widening out! Blessed are those who keep an eye out for the surprises!

## **Doing the Word**

So what is the Word of God for us today on this 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter?

### **1. ONE: OUR GOD IS GOD OF INCLUSION AND SO TOO ARE WE THE CHURCH (to be as well)!**

- ✓ Who is in and who is out?
- ✓ Who are the people around us that we don't invite to church?
- ✓ What is your/our boundary?
- ✓ Who's not invited to our Communion Table?
- ✓ How many of us eat with sinners and hang around with sinners?

### **2. TWO: LET'S STOP HINDERING** (*hold back, deter, hamper, encumber, get-in-the-way, thwart, impede*) **GOD!**

- ✓ In what doesn't suit us or what we believe.
- ✓ In what isn't conducive.
- ✓ In what is disconcerting.
- ✓ Let God change your mind, change your heart, and form your soul anew in the likeness of Christ.

### 3. THREE: WHO NEEDS TO BE INCLUDED IN OUR COMMUNITY OF TFCCCH?

Talking Story

#### **Sent in the Word**

God is reaching out to include all who have been excluded or regarded as second class by our tribal or racial or theological passions. Peter knew that he and all the followers of Jesus are under a new commandment that readily violates usual social arrangements (John 13:34-35). We are to **love** one another!

**The Spirit that crosses boundaries is the presence of the risen Christ! We who confess Easter are recruited to move in generous love across all the boundaries of “clean and unclean” ... citizens and immigrants, Jews and Muslims, rich and poor. All are invited to sign on for the “new earth” that will match the “new heaven” that comes through specific acts of neighborly generosity. All can “turn” (repent) toward God’s newness!**

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