

## IN THE JUDGE'S EYES

Today's reading from Acts brings us full circle. We're back where we were on Easter weekend; Acts chapter ten. There are perhaps two reasons for this return to where we have previously been not so long ago. The first is that a return to Acts chapter ten today is more reflective of what happens after the resurrection of Christ in the gospel of Luke and the descent of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts. On Easter weekend, we skip over an awful lot to cherry pick from a sermon in Acts chapter ten. Today, we return to Acts chapter ten, to let what follows from Easter and the descent of the Holy Spirit proceed in more linear fashion. Having previously heard from Acts chapter three, Acts chapter four, and Acts chapter eight this Eastertide, today we get to Acts chapter ten; with the Good News of Easter now farther out from Jerusalem than it's ever been before. When we don't cherry pick from St. Luke's second volume as we almost always do on Easter weekend, it's how it goes in the book of Acts. In St. Luke's two volume set, it's wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit and then take the Good News of Easter as far out from Jerusalem as you can. A return to Acts chapter ten today honors this outward and onward from Jerusalem trajectory; with Peter now north of Jerusalem sharing the Good News of Easter with a non-Jewish person and Roman official named Cornelius.

But a return to Acts chapter ten today might also be meant to clarify what we first hear Peter preach on Easter weekend pretty much every year. To be sure, what Peter has to say most Easter weekends is Good News. He announces the God of Israel shows no partiality. He announces that the resurrection proves Jesus is Lord of all and that of course includes you and me. This is Easter through and through. In Acts chapter ten, Peter announces that Easter is for everyone. He says there's a place for all of us in God's family and plan. It's Good News we all need to hear at some point, if not all the time.

Let's face it. Life is not always affirming or welcoming. Whether in reality or by way of perception, life sometimes leaves us feeling as if we're on the outside looking in with no one ready to open a door or window so we can come inside. Sometimes life makes us feel like the ugly duckling, the black sheep, the unwanted child, the middle child, or the stepchild. I really can't tell you the first time I was left feeling this way. It might have been when I had to start wearing glasses in the first grade. Who wants to be called "four-eyes" as I was? It also might have been when my mom was my substitute teacher in second grade. Both inside and outside of the home, it's not always fun to be a teacher's kid. It also could have been in third grade when I was not allowed to visit my dying Grandma Klimke in the intensive care unit because I was too young by the standards of that time. The simple fact of the matter is that my life has been filled with experiences and episodes which have made me feel alone and off in my own corner. The same thing has happened to you and it never stops.

Why in comparison to people my age or older do I have so few family members still living? Am I unlucky? Does God have it out for me? Or what about this? Why do my experiences in the military and in the business sector sometimes make me feel as if I'm a pastor from a different planet? Taken together and apart, this is the fifty-three-year-old version of the stuff I first began to feel in elementary school. No matter how much younger or older than me you are, you have your own version of the same. Given how much life can mess with our confidence and hope and sense of accomplishment, we need affirmation. We need someone to leave the light on for us. We need someone to embrace us and our lives with real and genuine hospitality. And through Acts chapter ten, pretty much every Easter weekend, we hear that God is this person. But is this what we really hear? There's a part of Peter's sermon on Easter

weekend that can leave this in doubt. Returning to Acts chapter ten again today, gives us the opportunity to set the record straight.

If there's anything which does in fact require corrective or clarifying attention, it would arise from what Peter says just after he announces that the God of Israel is impartial and just before he announces that Jesus is Lord of all. In between these twin pronouncements of the Good News of Easter, Peter says this. He says that the God of Israel is impartial because in every nation he accepts anyone who fears him and does what is right. If not put into some kind of context, this can easily pass itself off as another litmus test we have to pass. Without clarifying or correction attention, we can hear that to be a part of God's family and plan, we may not have to be Jewish, but we do have to fear him and do what is right. Ugh! As unconfident and insecure as we all can be, it's the last thing we need. We don't need another litmus test. We don't need another corner of our lives where we have to measure up. Imagine how another litmus test might be received by the women we celebrate this weekend. Often, as our opening song has suggested today, these women are already too hard on themselves. The last thing they need is another litmus test to pass or another bar or hurdle to clear. Take my own mother as an example.

Going on forty years after it happened, my mother still wonders if she and my father did the right thing when prior to high school they pulled my sister out of the public school system and put her in a private, Lutheran academy where she had to fit in with girls she didn't know and who had all known each other since kindergarten. It had been a transition that worked out okay for me, but not necessarily for my sister. Along similar lines, soon to be nineteen years after it happened, my mother still wonders if she did the right thing when she went to work on the day my father died at home prior to a scheduled doctor's appointment for an ongoing respiratory infection. This is where my mom goes naturally and whether we're mothers or not I think we've all got our own version of my mother's anxieties, insecurities, and worries. We don't need another litmus test. We don't need something else to worry about. We don't need another bar or hurdle to clear. What we need is for God to say, "You measure up." What we need is for God to say, "You're in, not out." What we need is for God to say, "I love you and I always will." And if we didn't hear God say this when we first visited Acts chapter ten five weeks ago, it's there to be heard today.

Today there's no talk of fearing God and doing the right thing. Instead, there's talk of the member of the Holy Trinity who makes this all happen and that's the Holy Spirit. Today there's just one thing which verifies our membership in God's family and our inclusion in God's plan and that's the gift of the Holy Spirit. If God's given you the Holy Spirit, Peter says today, you're in; you measure up in God's eyes; you're an integral part of God's family and plan. And make no mistake about it. The Holy Spirit has fallen on us just as the Spirit once fell on Cornelius and his household to the amazement of St. Peter. By the grace of God, the Holy Spirit is there to fall on us when we're baptized, when we interact with the Bible, when we share in the holy meal, and when we interact with one another. Like Cornelius and many, many Christians since, the gift of the Holy Spirit has fallen on us. We're in. We measure up in the eyes of God. The only judge who shall matter in the end loves us and always will. Now let's just go be our God-given selves and be completely okay with it. Amen!