

CALVARY BAPTIST CHURCH

Rev. Fred Weimert "Eating Together"

May 2, 2010

It has always been difficult for me to believe
that Peter...

that fisherman from Capernaum...

who I speak of every Christmas Eve

as *"that rough, unrefined, uncultured fisherman..."*

It is hard for me to believe

that this same Peter,

kept kosher.

That he was concerned about

what he ate

and how the food was prepared...

You don't usually find that

in uncultured people...

in people who have not been

culturally conditioned.

But in today's reading

in a conversation with God,

in the midst of a vision Peter says this

when God tempts him to eat something unclean...

"By no means, Lord;

for I have never eaten anything

that is profane or unclean."

Could those words have been true?

Could it have been

that Peter had kept kosher for his entire life...

Maybe kosher laws were different then,

less demanding then they have become

after 2,000 years of rabbinic rehashing...

Things could have become much stricter...

Who knows?

I suppose there was once a great need for such laws...

back before refrigeration...

back before seafood could be frozen

and flown from seaport to retail store...
 before the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.
 back when pigs were eating garbage
 and exposed to worms causing triginosis...
 I suppose there was a time when kosher laws were intended
 more to keep a person safe...
 rather than keeping people separate.
 But certainly over the years these laws did serve to divide
 people...
 more and more...
 building a gulf between the holy from the unholy...

Acts 10: 1-18

*In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius,
 a centurion of the Italian cohort,
 as it was called.*

*He was a devout man
 who feared God*

with all his household;

*he gave alms generously to the people
 and prayed constantly to God.*

*One afternoon at about three o'clock
 he had a vision in which he clearly saw
 an angel of God coming in and saying to him,
 “Cornelius.”*

*He stared at him in terror and said,
 “What is it, Lord?”*

*He answered,
 “Your prayers and your alms
 have ascended as a memorial before God.*

*Now send men to Joppa
 for a certain Simon who is called Peter;
 he is lodging with Simon, a tanner,
 whose house is by the seaside.”*

*When the angel who spoke to him had left,
 he called two of his slaves
 and a devout soldier
 from the ranks of those who served him,
 and after telling them everything,
 he sent them to Joppa.*

*About noon the next day,
 as they were on their journey and approaching the city,
 Peter went up on the roof to pray.
 He became hungry*

*and wanted something to eat;
and while it was being prepared,
he fell into a trance.*

*He saw the heaven opened
and something like a large sheet coming down,
being lowered to the ground by its four corners.
In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures
and reptiles and birds of the air.*

*Then he heard a voice saying,
“Get up, Peter; kill and eat.”*

*But Peter said,
“By no means, Lord;
for I have never eaten anything
that is profane or unclean.”*

*The voice said to him again, a second time,
“What God has made clean,
you must not call profane.”*

This happened three times,
(Things seem to be happening in threes
ever since Peter denied Jesus three times.)
and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven.

*Now while Peter was greatly puzzled
about what to make of the vision that he had seen,
suddenly the men sent by Cornelius appeared.
They were asking for Simon’s house
and were standing by the gate.
They called out to ask whether Simon,
who was called Peter,
was staying there.*

Here ends the reading.

Do you think that Peter was just so famished
that he had become faint...
delirious,
while he waited for the meal to be prepared?
Do you ever get hungry
and then start fantasizing about
your favorite foods...
Maybe Peter thought he was doing that...
but if he had been,
then don't you think he would have been fantasizing
about his favorite kosher foods...
maybe a corned beef sandwich,

better a Ruben...

(of course they weren't around yet.)

or maybe some of those potato latkes...

a knish...

Why would he start craving
things he had always hated?

reptiles,

birds of the air...

I feel fairly certain those birds weren't
ducks or geese...

probably not chickens or turkeys...

I think the sheet had birds

like vultures, crows, seagulls...

birds that feed on dead things.

Have you ever found yourself getting hungry
and begun to crave such things...

an order of vulture wings...

a side of snake ribs?

I never have...

No wonder Peter was greatly puzzled.

But this really wasn't about food was it...

It was about Jews and Gentiles...

the Stuff about Cornelius and his people tells us
that this was about Jews and Gentiles.

It was about the things that keep people
from eating together.

And those things aren't just kosher laws...

Kosher laws aren't an issue for us

any more are they?

We don't keep kosher,

but we do have a lot of dietary issues

There are people who are lactose intolerant...

others with allergies to peanuts... gluten... msg...

there are those who eat no food additives...

no antibiotics in meat...

There are vegetarian... vegans...

some want organically grown vegetables...

the list goes on and on...

and they are all important things...

more so to some than others.

So having folks over for dinner any more
 can be a meal planning nightmare...
 And it may become easier just not to get together,
 or when you do...
 not invite certain people.

But that is not the only thing
 that keeps us from inviting certain people over for dinner...
 Is it?

There are the race and economy issues...
 I thought a lot about this in Charlotte...

As I ate several meals
 in dining rooms filled with our African American
 brothers and sisters in Christ...

I thought about it as I walked around Charlotte
 and saw the streets filled with homeless people...
 most of them so cowed
 by their situation
 and undoubtedly the police...
 that they never looked up...
 never asked for anything...
 to eat ... to drink.

It is funny when you sit down and eat with people
 and make some small talk
 the distance between us grows smaller...
 we discover our shared humanity...

We find that we are frighteningly similar...
 rich and poor
 black and white...
 Jew and gentile.

It is not surprising that Jesus encouraged his disciples
 to remember him
 by breaking bread together.

What is horribly ironic is how
 we, in the Church, have taken Jesus' invitation
 and used it to divide ourselves from each other.

You don't understand it properly...
 we couldn't possibly concelebrate...
 we can't possibly eat together.

We can't remember
 Jesus in us, together.

This table that speaks volumes about God

Taking on human flesh
and dwelling among us...

Is all about Christ in me
encountering Christ in you...
that "you" being plural...
meaning everyone...
all flesh.

Even those people
who are unaware that Christ
is in them...
that they bear
the image of God.

How could we exclude any one made in the image of God
and believe that God is with us?... Immanuel.

Come prepare yourselves to celebrate.

And to share Christ's peace
with each other...

and everyone else you meet today...
everyday.

Amen.