

“Please Pass the Ham!”

Acts 10:9-16

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Rev. William A. Huegel

Wallingford First Baptist Church

This story in Acts 10 and 11 represents one of those watershed moments in the history of the Christian Church. The Christian Gospel, which began as a movement within Judaism, at this point was beginning to reach out beyond Judaism to embrace the Gentile world. One of the issues had to do with food. Now food had always been an issue as people moved from one culture to another.

Even within our country, food is an issue. I do not know of any restaurant in Wallingford that sells **corn grits**. **In fact, it is even hard to buy good biscuits and gravy.** But go to **West Virginia** and it's a common staple.

When we go to the **Dominican Republic** you can tell who spends a lot of time on the island and who only comes for a week. I go to a little Caribbean restaurant that serves a **plantain casserole, rice and beans, and a hearty serving of goat meat** while most everyone else lines up at Burger King.

A pastor who did some mission work in **Indonesia** tells the following story:

“What is a delicacy in one part of the world is not necessarily a delicacy in another. About 6 years ago I was in Indonesia on a mission's tour. We were at a restaurant beside a lake where the only light was a few flickering lanterns and so you couldn't see much of what you were eating. We were being treated to a great feast which included a chicken dish. As expected, in it were **chicken's feet** - quite crunchy & quite a delicacy. The atmosphere was quite placid until one of our elderly leaders let loose with a casual “Oh its a head - I wondered why it was so hard.” Thinking he'd selected a lovely looking piece of meat, he tried to take a bite from it. Being like a rock, on further inspection, this lovely piece of meat was in fact **the head, complete with beak and eyes.**” (Rev. David Elvery, “Freedom to eat, Freedom to meet, Freedom to speak” sermon July 2007)

But it was more than mere cultural tradition and preference for Peter in Acts 10.

This was a huge religious issue. You see the Jews had dietary laws, given by God through Moses, regarding what to eat and what not to eat. Jews could only eat **fish with scales** on it, for example. They could eat meat of animals that had a **cloven foot**. So, they could eat goats and sheep, but they could not eat the meat of a horse. Horses don't have cloven hoofs.

Peter had a God-given dream of animals of all kinds of four-footed beasts as well as reptiles. Oh, by the way, **some people do eat snakes.** When we were in a batey a couple of weeks ago, Pastor Lubin asked someone if there were snakes out in the village. The man he asked said, “Oh yes. I ate one yesterday.” “Oh really”. “Yes, they are good

boiled or fried – if you see one, you let me know!” If that sounds disgusting to you, think of poor Peter, a good Jew who just knew that was unnatural and against the law of God. (By the way, **pigs are the most disgusting animal of all**. Just look at how filthy they get and look at the garbage they eat). But God said, “*Get up, Peter! Kill the animals. Have yourself a nice banquet. Roast yourself a little pork and some nice iguana, and try a little turkey buzzard – they have really crunchy toes.*” (Well, I’m paraphrasing a little, but that’s the essence of what is being said here).

(I’ve always wondered what our **Seventh Day Adventist** friends do with this passage. They are all vegetarians. Can you imagine God saying to one of their leaders, “Come on you guys, and lighten up. Have some nice roasted ham at your next church bean supper. And throw in a little goat meat – it’s delicious!) They would agree with Peter:

“Surely not, Lord!” Peter replied. “*I have never eaten anything impure or unclean in my life.*” Well, get with the program, God said! And, “*don’t call anything impure that I have made!*”

God was doing more in that vision than preparing Peter for his cross-cultural adventures. God was calling out a people who were not Jewish, a people who didn’t know you shouldn’t eat lobster and shellfish, a people who didn’t know why you should eat unleavened bread at Passover, nor did they know anything about Passover. He was calling a people who ate pork to be His people!

You see, God had sent His only begotten Son into the world. He had come to His own people, and His own people did not receive Him. But to those who did receive Him, to those who did receive Jesus as their Messiah, as their own personal savior, to them He gave the power to become the very children of God. Not just children of Israel – not just children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but to them He gave the power to become the very children of God. That’s what was happening here. God was beginning to call a people who were nobody special, to become somebody very special – to become His people.

God had come to Cornelius and prepared his heart. Now He was coming to Peter to prepare him for something very new. The brand new realization had come to Peter, “Now I realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.”

Furthermore, his preaching to Cornelius and his Gentile audience was accompanied by a powerful demonstration of the Holy Spirit. 10:44 says, “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. They heard them speaking in tongues and praising God (which reminded them of what happened on the day of Pentecost). Peter was so impressed that he said, “Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.” So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.” Acts 10:47-48.

Chapter 11 of Acts is all about Peter going back to Jerusalem and reporting what happened and how the Holy Spirit was moving in a Gentile setting.

1. **The Jews were at first offended:** “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them?” 11:3 That was unthinkable for Jews.
2. **Peter explained:** Peter explained everything to them precisely as it happened: the vision, his surprise, the Lord’s response, his obedience, the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit, and his decision to baptize them.
3. **The response of the Jerusalem church:** vs. 18 “When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, ‘So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.’”
4. **The persecution scattered Jewish Christians** who told the message, first of all, only to Jews. Some, however, **went to Antioch** and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. – **A great number believed and turned to the Lord. 19-21**
5. **The Jews were still surprised.** When the Jerusalem church learned of this, they did a very responsible thing; they **sent** a highly respected representative to check it out. His name was **Barnabas** which vs. 24 describes as a “good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith.”
6. “When he arrived and **saw the evidence of the grace of God**, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.” 11:23 Barnabas went to look for Saul, found him, brought him back to Antioch, and for a whole year, Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people.” And then this note: “*The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.*”

From that point on, **Antioch, not Jerusalem, became the center of mission outreach.** In Acts 13, Barnabas and Saul were sent out to preach to the Gentiles from Antioch.

Christian outreach continued for several hundred years. Rome became the center partly because it was the center of political power.

The 19th and 20th century experienced a renewal of mission outreach. Christians were to take this gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth. But for 1000 years or more, Christianity got very mixed up with politics and it was hard to separate the two. The drive to help reach the world and to have people accept Jesus Christ as their own Lord and Savior died out. It was later renewed with people like Adoniram Judson and many other great missionaries of the 19th and 20th century. Today, there are more people coming to faith in Christ than at any other period of Christian history. For more than a hundred years the primary sending countries were the US and Europe, particularly England. But today, there are more missionaries from developing countries and from continents like South America and Africa than from the US or Europe. God is doing a new thing as the Gospel crosses geographical and cultural boundaries. It has been wonderful for FBC to be a part of it. Short Term Missions in which people go abroad for one week to two years is having a huge impact on the sending American and European Churches as well as on the rest of the world.

God is doing a new thing.