

Sermon Draft

Text: Acts 10:34–48

Sermon Draft: God Shows No Partiality

Our text from Acts reveals the urgency of the first-century believers along with Peter in proclaiming the crucified and resurrected Christ to all, for repentance and the forgiveness of sins. Peter meets the devout Gentile and Roman centurion Cornelius. Our text, then, is a continuation of that encounter. The vision Peter has concerning food, indicating that no food is unclean, leads him to the God-given interpretation that no people are unclean. Gentiles, therefore, are objects of God's love, just as are the Jews.

The pastor's pre-service announcements went, "We're so pleased you've made your way to Grace Church today. We believe God led you here today, and we truly want to have you know and experience God's grace today. Grace. G-R-A-C-E: **God's Riches at Christ's Expense**. We want you to know that God is rich in his love for you, no matter who you are.

We want you to know that Jesus died on the cross and rose again from the dead for you. God bless your time with us today.”

The part about “God’s Riches at Christ’s Expense” took a first time visitor back about twenty years. His own pastor had used the same acronym to define “grace” in his confirmation class. With that old memory on his mind he settled back in his seat for the worship service.

Today we hear about God’s grace in a unique way in Acts 10, where Peter proclaims, ***“Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him”*** (vs 34–35).

God shows no partiality. That is the way it is with his heart of grace. His love reaches to anyone anywhere, all nationalities, all races, all ages, all types of people, rich or poor, lifelong Christian or new believer.

God's love reaches to those who have known and worshiped God as long as they can remember, and his love reaches those who are searching to fill the emptiness in their lives. No one is out of the reach of God's love. God our **Savior** "**desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth**" (1 Timothy 2:4). This is wonderful news for all of us. God desires to save us all.

So, do you see all people as God sees them? Do you love them all as God loves them? Does our congregation? Is our congregation a place of grace in a cold and lonely world, a place where we are eager to connect all people to God's love for them in Jesus Christ? All people?

We have all been hurt by the words and actions of people. Close relatives have disappointed and failed us. At work, we may have been passed up for a promotion by someone who did not deserve it. See those people as God sees them? Love them? A little self-evaluation and honesty can help us to understand that we are difficult to love too, sometimes.

Folks are supposed to love us even when we are unloving.

We all struggle with seeing people as God sees them and loving them as God loves them. Peter and the other earliest Christ-followers were Jewish believers, and God brought his Son, Jesus, the Messiah, first of all to the Jews in the region of Israel, in places like Judea and Galilee. It made sense to Peter, John, James, and the other Jewish believers that they, ***“children of Abraham”*** and members of the household of Israel, were part of God’s family through Spirit-given faith.

But for those earliest followers of Jesus, God’s grace toward those outside the chosen people of God, outside Judaism, was difficult to accept. Would God be so lavish with his grace that he would pour out his Spirit on the Gentiles too? So impartial with his love that he would welcome them into his family?

Peter was one of those doubters. It took a God-given vision for Peter to understand this impartiality of God concerning those outside the circle of his people, the chosen children of Israel.

Do you remember the God-inspired vision? It happens earlier in Acts 10, in verses 1–33, just before our text today. Peter is hungry, and he has a vision about food being let down from heaven on a sheet. The foods he sees are various animals and reptiles and birds—foods that were unclean according to Jewish law. In the vision, God tells Peter to kill and eat them. After Peter protests that this food is unclean, God says, ***“What God has made clean, do not call common.”*** (v 15)

The message for Peter? Well, at that very moment, Peter receives a request from a man named Cornelius, a Roman soldier, a centurion, a Gentile, not a Jew—to come to his house. Turns out, Cornelius has had a vision too. So, Peter goes to his home. When he arrives and sees a whole crowd of Gentiles eager to hear God’s Word from him, he gets it! ***“God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean”*** (v 28). Peter went on to proclaim the Good News of Jesus’ death and resurrection to Cornelius and the other Gentiles that day.

He said, ***“To [Christ Jesus] all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name”*** (v 43, emphasis added). The Spirit fell on these people, and they were baptized. God showed no partiality. His love engulfed them, and they were saved.

It is clear that God loves all people and that he desires all to be saved through faith in Christ. In this sense, no one is unclean or common in his sight. But there is also a sense in which all people are common and unclean. I’m referring to the sin that clings to us all. Everyone has it. We are all unclean sinners. God sees this sin clearly in the worst of us and in the best of us, in people of all types and ages, all nationalities, all races, in all places. Sin deserves God’s punishment. It deserves death, even eternal death.

And sin sure creates problems among us. Showing partiality (“playing favorites”) is the sin God’s Word is uncovering today. And this sin of showing partiality can have immense consequences.

In our partiality, we might listen only to conservative talk radio and not to other points of view. We might value the opinions of longtime church members but disregard the opinions of new members. We might talk with our friends at church while we ignore the others who really need a friend. We play favorites.

Our playing favorites, our showing partiality, can result in feelings of superiority or inferiority, depending on the side we are on. It can lead to an attitude of “this is my church, not yours,” with the result that others feel, “If this is your church, I don’t want anything to do with it!” or worse, “If that’s what your Jesus is about, I don’t want anything to do with him!”

We need help. Some divine intervention. And God delivers that help and intervention. God sent Jesus into this world as the divine partiality-buster. Jesus hardly looked divine. He was a common man, blending in with the young men of the villages of Galilee and the crowds in Jerusalem.

But there was something strikingly different about him too. Jesus showed no partiality. He did not play favorites. He crossed the boundaries of society, bringing hope and forgiveness to shepherds and fishermen, to the woman at Jacob's well who had had five husbands, to a chief tax collector in Jericho. He healed. He restored. He fed. He taught as one who had authority, for he was God in human flesh.

As the God-man, Jesus perfectly loved and obeyed his heavenly Father. Even though he was the sinless Son of God, he was the victim of gross injustice and partiality. He was accused by his fellow Jews of falsely claiming to be God and by the Romans of claiming to be a king. Death by crucifixion was his sentence. It was surely the greatest injustice of all time, that sinful men nailed Jesus to the cross, but it was the heavenly Father's plan that this punishment should happen to his beloved Son.

For Jesus was the Father's promised Lamb of God, who would take away the sins of the world, the righteous for the unrighteous, the impartial for the partial. Yes, God the Father laid on his Son the guilt of us all! My sins were on Jesus. Your sins were on him. The sins of all people of all generations, all nationalities, all races, all ages, all types of people in all places. God shows no partiality.

Jesus suffered on the cross. He died. But on the third day, he rose from the dead. This was the great sign that the Father accepted the sacrifice of his Son. The sign that sin is forgiven and that life wins. Nothing could stop the apostles from proclaiming the Good News of the resurrected and victorious Savior, and nothing should stop us either: ***"Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name"*** (v 43). Everyone! God shows no partiality.

We are the people who belong to the Church of the risen Lord Jesus Christ! He is alive, and his Spirit is active among us.

The Spirit is moving to make us a community of believers who know and rejoice that we are dearly loved by God. But there is more Good News. The love that saved us is the love that also transforms us! Living in that love of God, we can be different people, people who don't play favorites, people who willingly and joyfully love and serve all types of people.

What can the transforming love of God for you and for all of us mean for our life together in our congregation? We live in an impersonal world, a harsh world. People yearn for community, a place to belong, a place where they are loved and accepted. This kind of church will listen. It will serve. This kind of church will attract others. This kind of church will connect others to the love of Christ, which knows no boundaries and forgives all sins. For God shows no partiality, and neither will we in our congregation. God corrects our vision so that we can see people as God sees and love people as God loves.

Amen