

Sermon Draft

Text: Acts 11:1–18

Sermon: “Us Dogs Get to go to Heaven”

Last Sunday was Good Shepherd Sunday. Jesus told those leaders who were trying to trap him: *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand”* (John 10:27–28). The Jews thought this included only them. It is the shock of all shocks to find that us Gentiles, or as they liked to call us dogs are included in the flock too. Then in next week’s text (Acts 16:9–15), the Gospel travels to Philippi, a Roman colony filled with Gentiles.

You just don’t do it! No way. You don’t willingly allow a stray dog to crash your wedding. I mean, that dog would be dirty. Who knows where it came from! It may even be vicious and bite. No, I’ve never heard of a couple listing a stray dog on their wedding invitation list. Yet in October 2017, a stray dog did crash a wedding. A couple named Matheus and Maria were getting married in Brazil.

They had planned an outdoor ceremony, but a storm forced them under the shelter of a tent. Unfortunately for the guests, the storm brought a dog. Oh, they tried to shoo him away, but the dog was persistent. Each time he came right back. The third time that pup did the unthinkable. He plopped right down on the bride's long veil as she was speaking her vow, and he went to sleep. And you know what? Surprisingly, the bride left him there.

This dog wasn't the only "dog" who crashed a wedding. Let's talk about that today using the theme: Salvation extends to all people, even Gentiles.

So, who were the dogs? They were the Gentiles. The Jews had other names for them, including the heathen, loathsome, abominations, and outsiders. You get the picture. There wasn't much love between these two peoples. That's why the word concerning the Gentiles—that Peter had seen a vision, had gone to the home of the Roman centurion Cornelius, had preached Christ, and they, too, had believed the Word of God—was so shocking.

This meant they could be part of the wedding of Jesus and his Bride, the Church!

It shouldn't have been so surprising, though. Recall what God said to Abram: ***“No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations”*** (Genesis 17:5).

Then there was the parable Jesus taught. It was about a wedding feast, and those invited (the Jews) wouldn't come. What did the king do? Jesus explained: ***“Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.’ And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests”*** (Matthew 22:8–10). The wedding was filled, even with Gentiles! Those stray, unclean dogs!

This is what the Jews would be thinking. No wonder Peter was criticized: ***“You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them”*** (v 3). The Jews were saying, “You ate with them, Peter. Don’t you know you don’t do that? Don’t you know you might become like them? Don’t you know *they* are Gentiles, and *we* are Jews?”

But God did include them. The Gentiles were on the guest list. There was room in heaven for them! Peter had to do some explaining. First, he told them about his vision. Then he gave evidence of the word of Jesus, and you know what? They were convinced. They allowed for the dog.

Our text explains: ***“They glorified God, saying, ‘Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life’”*** (v 18). This was news of epic proportions. It shook up the world back then and should shake up yours.

The Bible says: *“You are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise”* (Galatians 3:26–29).

“For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’” (Romans 10:12–13).

Christ died for all! The sins of the whole world were nailed to the cross! There it is again—there is no distinction, no “us” and “them,” no exclusive club. It doesn’t matter where the person is from, what they like or don’t like, or who they’re related to or are not related to. To God, salvation is open to all.

That means the Gospel is for everyone! It means that thee won't be just Lutherans in heaven. That's good to remember, especially when new folks walk into our church. Oh, they might not be dressed like us or related. They might not talk like us. They might even sit in your pew, but before you ask them: "Just who invited you?" or do something to make them feel unwelcomed or uncomfortable, remember the Gospel is for everyone. Christ sent his disciples out into the world to all people and he sends us out too. Or wants us to invite them to come and be with us and here the Gospel.

There are lots of "Gentiles" around us. They are our neighbors, co-workers, and classmates. They might be those who attend a different church or maybe don't attend at all. They are those we, because of our sinful judgmental human nature we could never imagine within ten feet of heaven. What would God have us do with them? That's easy. Love them. That's it. Love them because they, too, need the Gospel.

This is not saying we have to embrace what they believe. We don't even have to hold hands and sing "Kumbaya." No, nothing like that. However, we can treat them like we would like to be treated. After all, doesn't the Bible make a promise about them too? ***"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life"*** (John 3:16).

And that leads us back to the wedding crasher mentioned at the start. So how did it end? As the story goes, the dog came and went. The reception went on as planned. The couple was a little sad to see the dog disappear. But days later, they found him . . . they cleaned him up . . . adopted him . . . and named him Snoop. Who would have thought? Then again, who would have thought the Lord would find us, clean us up, and adopt us into his family? Who would have thought that the Lord would give us a place at his table? Who would have thought he would have in his heart love for us strays? Who would have thought? But he did, didn't he? And you know, there is plenty room for more.

Amen