

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Watertown, WI**

“God Shows No Partiality”

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“Peter said: ‘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’” (Acts 10:34-35.)

The greatest cultural challenge facing the first Christians was welcoming the Gentiles into the Church. Remember, the earliest Christians were made up mostly of those who were formerly Jewish. For centuries, a Jewish person would not even enter the home of a Gentile as it would make the Jewish person unclean. You recall when the High Priests were demanding that Pilate should crucify Jesus, they refused to go into the Roman governor’s headquarters. It would have rendered them unclean. Therefore, Pilate had to keep coming out to them.

You can imagine how this might have peeved the Roman governor. With all his prestige and power, and the splendor of his headquarters, still they refuse to enter, as if he were somehow filthy and his home infested? You can also imagine how this would have created acrimony between Gentiles and Jews. This sort of thing was going on for centuries; it wouldn’t just stop on a dime. It would take some time before Christians of Jewish backgrounds felt comfortable entering the home of a Gentile.

Our text describes one of the first times it ever happened. God arranged for Peter to go into the house of a Gentile named Cornelius. Cornelius was a centurion, a Roman officer in command of 100 soldiers. Luke tells us that Cornelius, living among the Jews in Caesarea, had become “a devout man who feared God . . . gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually.” He had a good reputation even among the Jews. Cornelius is given a vision in which an angel of the Lord tells him he should send men to Joppa to find a man named Simon Peter and bring him back to Caesarea. Cornelius immediately sends three men to Joppa (about 30 miles away) and sure enough, they find Peter (Acts 10).

Meanwhile, the Holy Spirit pays a visit on Peter, and says, “Behold, three men are going to be looking for you. Rise and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them” (Acts 10:20). Notice how God must arrange things on both sides. Otherwise, it would never have happened. Up to this point, Peter had been ministering exclusively among Jewish Christians. But now God was planning to bring into the mix a bunch of Gentiles, outsiders.

Meanwhile, Cornelius was expecting Peter to come, and had “called together his relatives and close friends” for the occasion (10:24). So, it’s a big moment when Peter, a Jewish man and disciple of Jesus with a big reputation walks right into the home of a Gentile full of other Gentiles in order to share the Gospel. Cornelius welcomes him and says, “you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.”

Peter opened his mouth and said, “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” (10:34). Peter tells them everything. He tells them there is now peace with God through Jesus Christ who is Lord of all. Cornelius and his household understand the message and believe it. Immediately, they are baptized. Once word of this gets out, it makes waves in the early church. Peter’s actions are harshly criticized by some and accepted by others.

But this is the start of it. This is the start of God’s church reaching out to the Gentiles. This is probably the start of how you find yourself in the church today. At some time, someone reached across cultural boundaries to share the Christian faith with your ancestors. Those missionaries were foreigners in a foreign land. They were probably a little worried for their safety, a little uncertain about the things your ancestors

considered to be food. They were probably struggling with the language of your ancestors, wondering what of their customs and traditions they might be transgressing. They probably felt like they stood out like a sore thumb what with their odd clothing and their strange accent and, most of all, their faith in Jesus. Yet, because God shows no partiality, they knew they shouldn't show partiality either. They took a risk and shared the Gospel of Jesus Christ with your ancestors. They got past their anxiety, because God accepts those from any nation who believe in him and do what's right.

God shows no favoritism and does not want us to show favoritism either. For example, He does not want us to assess or judge others based on their appearances.

When it was time to appoint a king, God told Samuel to go to the house of Jesse, for the new king will be from among his sons. Samuel saw Eliab there, first-born of Jesse. He was strong, tall and handsome, especially compared to the other boys, and Samuel thought surely this is the one God has in mind to be king. "But the LORD said to Samuel, 'Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees; man looks at appearances, but the LORD looks on the heart'" (1 Sam. 16:7).

God shows no partiality, nor does He want us to show partiality. When King Jehoshaphat was appointing judges over God's people, he warned them "Be careful what you do, for there is no injustice with the LORD our God, or partiality" (2 Ch. 19:7). Favoritism to the rich, or to the poor for that matter is evil, because God judges justly and the judges are God's representatives in the courts.

God shows no partiality. Right from the start, when Jesus was born, there was room and welcome at the manger for lowly shepherds, but also for blue-blooded magi from the East. As an adult, he ate in the homes of sinners but also in the homes of Pharisees. He told a story about a Good Samaritan in an era when most of His peers wondered if a Samaritan could be good. And after speaking with the woman at the well, he and his disciples were invited to stay in that Samaritan village, which they did, for two more days.

God shows no partiality. In Ephesians, Paul warns masters to stop threatening their servants, because [quote] "Christ is both their Master and yours, and there is no partiality with him" (Eph. 6:9).

James says don't you dare give special honor to the rich while telling the poor man to stand over there. "If you show partiality" James writes, "you are committing sin" (2:1ff).

As Christians we reach out with the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all people because all people need the Gospel. The undocumented immigrant needs the Gospel; the one confused about her sexual identity needs it; the white Supremist needs it; the child with severe autism needs it; Muslims, Hindus, atheists . . . As God arranged for Peter to cross paths with Cornelius and his household, he arranges for you and me to cross paths with people who are very different. But they all need the same love of God in Jesus Christ. They all need to hear the same message Peter shared with Cornelius: Jesus is Lord and Savior. He died for all people and truly wants all people to be saved.

God shows no favoritism, and that is very good news indeed, because if he did show favoritism, you and I might well find ourselves on the outside. Paul wrote, "Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor. 1:26).

God shows no partiality. The poorest members in the church are as treasured as the richest. The newest member as treasured as the charter member. We listen respectfully to the needs and opinions of the one with intellectual disabilities as we do to the one with the PhD.

That's the kind of unity Jesus prayed for in the church and talked about with his disciples, that we would be one even as He and the Father are one.

Then He gave us the sacraments. When you were baptized, you were washed clean of sin, but you were also joined to the Body of Christ. You share that with every other Christian who has been baptized. This means you have more in common with the one who believes and is baptized in North Korea than you do with a neighbor who has no faith.

When you eat the body of Christ and drink His blood, the Lord forgives you, but also draws you close together with other believers into one fellowship, a koinonia stronger than any group, club, league or organization. It seems when the Lord blots out our sin, he also blots out the barriers that exist between sinners. So, the Lord shows no partiality, doesn't want us to show partiality either, and with His forgiveness and with His sacraments, gives the gift of unity and fellowship to us as Christians. We are equally members of the Body of Christ.

Jesus does not love anyone else more than He loves you. He loves you fully, whoever you are or whatever you've done. He laid down his life for all of us, not just some of us. He has good plans for all of us, not just a select few. And heaven has room and welcome for all of us just as the manger scene did for shepherds and magi because God shows no partiality. Thanks be to God.