

Companions for the Journey
Part 18: Reaching Beyond Our Religious Barriers
Rethink and Reimagine

Acts 10 – Peter, unclean food, and Cornelius, a Roman Centurion

¹In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort, as it was called. ²He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God. ³One afternoon about three o'clock he had a vision in which he clearly saw an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius".

⁹About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. ¹⁰He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance. ¹¹He saw the heaven opened and something large like a sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. ¹²In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. ¹³Then he heard a voice saying, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat." ¹⁴But Peter said, "By no means Lord; for I have never eaten something that is profane or unclean." ¹⁵The voice said to him again, a second time, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." ¹⁶This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven.

²⁸And he [Peter] said to them, "You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean. ²⁹So when I was sent for, I came without objection. Now may I ask why you sent for me?"

³⁴Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵but in every nation anyone who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to God. ³⁶You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. ³⁷That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: ³⁸how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ³⁹We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; ⁴⁰but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, ⁴¹not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴²He commanded us to preach to the people and testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and dead. ⁴³All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

⁴⁴While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. ⁴⁵The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles.

The best, most current research indicates that involvement of young people (children and students) in youth ministry events and program is NOT indicative of lasting faith and continued involvement in Christ's Church. Rather, young people develop lasting faith and continue to participate in Christ's Church when they have supportive parents, are relationally invested in by adults, and are relationally and logistically integrated into the church.¹

1. Can we rethink our "external expectations and barriers"?

"The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles." – Acts 10:45

2. Can we reimagine who is invited to "the table"?

"There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." – Galatians 3:28

"A community is only truly a body when the majority of its members is making the transition from 'the community for myself' to 'myself for the community', when each person's heart is opening to all the others, without any exception. This is the movement from egoism to love, from death to resurrection; it is the Easter, a passage, the Passover of the Lord. It is also the passing from a land of slavery to a promised land, the land of inner freedom."

Jean Vanier, *Growth and Community*

Jean Vanier is the founder of the world famous l'Arche community for the mentally handicapped adults and their helpers made famous by Henri Nouwen's writings.