

"Boundary Breaking"
(Acts 11: 1-18)
May 15, 2022

Three men from Caesarea invited Peter to enter a man's house, and Peter finally stayed with them for a few days. Who was this unnamed man that caused Peter trouble? Last week I mentioned his name. He is called Cornelius, the captain of the Italian Guard.

For us, there was nothing unusual about entering another person's house. It's not a problem, especially if it's because of an invitation. But it didn't work the same way between the Jews and the Greeks in the first century. The apostle Peter must have observed the dietary laws according to the Torah since he was young. It was a practice at home, three meals a day, seven days a week, no questions asked, and everyone was doing the same. Is it easy to follow the dietary laws? It is probably not too difficult. It's only a choice of food if an allergy is not involved. Is it that simple? No. Don't underestimate the contrast that when one chooses to follow the dietary laws, the rest of the world does not do so. What does it mean? It means it looks odd. Just like, if you serve Peter a piece of black pudding, he will not eat it. Why? It's because it contains pork or beef blood. What about Shephard's Pie and Quiche? He might eat, or he might not. He needs to find out if dairy products, like milk or cheese, were added since the Jewish dietary laws won't allow eating meat together with dairy products. Then, what about grape products? Well, he won't eat them if non-Jews make them. And don't try him with catfish, eels, lobsters, oysters, shrimp, clams, crabs, squid, octopus, and a lot more, as these are all forbidden. There're no scientific reasons to justify it. They are forbidden just because it is so written.

So, what did it mean to the Jewish Christian community when Peter entered the house of a Gentile with no such food restrictions. What do you think he might have done during those few days with that household (Acts 10: 48)? No wonder Peter was accused with the question, "Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?" The Jewish Christians in the first century saw themselves initially as a subset of Judaism. They were like a liberal party, inspired by Jesus, held on to his words, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." (Matt 5:17) That's why they insisted the Gentiles needed circumcision and observe the dietary laws before they could become one of them.

If we put the words and deeds of Jesus into perspective, we could understand better why Jesus was defensive in his saying because what he did, did look like he was abolishing the Law and the Prophets. The written words trapped the Jews. Their faith in God has lost its vitality because the stipulations, which are dead, had replaced the Holy Spirit, who is living.

But a voice said to Peter, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat (the four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air)." It's a call to Peter to break the boundary. It's not like asking him to eat a sandwich in the shape of a snake, but a snake meat sandwich, for real. Unless you are used to eating reptiles, you must have the same feeling as Peter, disgusting. But the voice came the second time and said, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." So put aside the prejudice, and reconsider it. And Peter did rethink it as the same visions happened to him three times.

Peter was not the only one God inspired to break boundaries and break away from the tradition that nourished him. We all are. Paul wrote, "In Christ's family there can be no division into Jew and non-Jew, slave and free, male and female. Among us you are all equal. That is, we are all in a common relationship with Jesus Christ." (Gal 3:28 – The Message) Paul pointed out the goals, but it's a long process. Do you think the racial issue is over now? If it's over, we don't see the logo "Black lives matter" everywhere. If it's over, then the United Church of Canada didn't need to commit to becoming an anti-racist denomination and started programs to combat this problem from within the church. We might think there're only a few places on earth still enslaving people, and most are free. However, for your information, almost 40% of the world population, more than 3 billion people, live now under dictatorship. If you watch the news, take China as an example, a lot of people, including but not only in Shanghai and Beijing, live a life comparable to enslaved people, if not worse than that. What about gender equality? It's still in the infant stage. In 2021, there were 41 female Fortune CEOs out of 500.

Boundaries protect our societies from dissociation, but at the same time, they prevent us from deviating from the norms. Is it always a good thing?

"Millennial" refers to anyone born between 1981 and 1995, i.e., between 26 to 40 of age. There are about 2 billion of them on earth. They are, in general, better educated when compared to their parents and grandparents. Our hope for the future relies on them. They are blessed by the tech world that has made them believe they can do anything. Many of them start early to seek a healthy lifestyle. While some wish to enjoy their lives and might give others an impression of

laziness, some push themselves so hard that others doubt if they can distinguish between being confident and arrogant. Since they grew up with TVs, computers, and other electronic devices, it's an uphill battle for many to regain the ability to relate to actual people. It becomes a question if they are really good at multitasking or simply can't focus on one task. They often have a hard time being present in conversations too. On top of that, most of them are sensitive and unable to take or give criticism.

Is it fair then to put our hope for the future on them? They are educated but not wealthy. They try to focus on a healthy lifestyle, work out more, and drink less, but they are spiritually empty. They try to move forward but are paralyzed by student loan debt. Electronic devices, phone plans, and data plans are their priorities, making settling with a home the last on their list. The lack of skill set for communication weakens further the human relationship. And they can't tell the difference between the consequences of pro-life and pro-birth.

Do you feel that we are talking too much of this earthly world rather than the heavenly or spiritual one? "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." From the beginning, God sees the creation as a piece of art (Gen 1:31) - the contrast between 'light' and 'darkness' (Gen 1:4); the distinction between 'land' and the 'sea' (Gen 1:10) are all good; 'procreation' and 'varieties' made it abundant (Gen 1: 12, 21, 25); 'Sun' and 'moon' give it a sense of rhythm. (Gen 1:18)

Seriously, suppose we want to put our hope for the future on the next generations. In that case, we have to learn their language, listen to their favorite songs, feel their frustration, and be available to accompany them when they feel

lost. Boundaries block us from reaching them and stop them from reaching God too. But no one should be left out because God gives every soul the same gift, which we feel when we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." So be ready to break the boundaries and cross to the other sides. God is ahead of us; keep following. We can keep asking, "Are we there yet?" No, we shall not be there. The reason is simple. Once we are 'there', 'there' becomes 'here.' Just as the kingdom of God becomes 'here' and not 'there' anymore. Amen.