

# NOT UNCLEAR

Last week we heard how, in the first weeks of the apostles' preaching, thousands of people heard their message and joined the gathering of believers. But even as they started to go out from Jerusalem to bring the good news to people in other cities and towns, they still only approached Jewish people with their message. After all, the Jewish people were the ones who had a special relationship with God, through the laws God told to Moses and through their ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And of course Jesus himself was Jewish. What did he have to say to people, like the Romans, who worshipped other gods?

A man named Cornelius changed that. He was a Roman soldier, the general of a group of soldiers called the Italian Regiment. Despite being from Rome, he tried to know God as well as he could. He gave money to poor people who asked for his help, and he prayed to God every day. One day, in the middle of the afternoon Cornelius had a vision of an angel walking towards him. He was terrified when the angel called his name. "What is it, sir?" he stammered.

"God has seen your gifts to the poor, and heard your prayers," the angel told him. "Now God has something for you. Send for a man named Simon Peter, who is staying with Simon the tanner in the city of Joppa, in a house near the ocean." So of course Cornelius sent some of his servants off right away.

Just as those servants were getting close to Joppa the next day, Simon Peter—who was, of course, the apostle Peter—went up onto the roof of his friend's house to pray. It was almost lunchtime and he was hungry. As soon as he started praying he fell into a trance and saw a vision: the sky opened and something like a sheet came down, lowered from its four corners. On the sheet were all sorts of animals, reptiles, and birds. Then Peter heard a voice say, "Get up, kill some of those animals, and eat them."

Now as a Jewish person Peter knew he could never eat animals that the Bible said were unclean—in fact, he thought animals like pigs, lobsters, and owls were disgusting! And here they were, with a voice from God telling him to kill them and eat them. "No Lord, I could never do that!" he protested. "I've never eaten anything unclean!"

"Don't call something unclean if God has made it clean," said the voice. The same thing happened three times. As Peter was sitting there wondering what on earth his vision could mean, Cornelius' servants reached the house. When Peter heard they were looking for him he went downstairs, and they invited him to come with them to see Cornelius the next day.

When they reached Cornelius' house, Peter followed the servants in through the front door. Cornelius was waiting, and he fell down at Peter's feet and worshipped him. "Stand up!" Peter told him. "I'm a human just like you!" Then Peter told Cornelius that, as a Jewish person, he had never before gone into the home of a Gentile—that is, a person who isn't Jewish. Just like lobster, people outside the Jewish faith were unclean. "But," Peter said, "God just showed me that, to God, nothing is unclean! So when I got your message, I came right away."

Cornelius told Peter about his vision, and Peter prayed with him and told him about Jesus. The Holy Spirit filled the house, and everyone there started praising God and speaking in tongues. Seeing that God had already filled them with the Spirit, Peter asked them if they wanted to be baptized. They all did, everyone in Cornelius' household: the first Gentiles to be baptized.

*flip over for more!*

That was big news! But when Peter went back to Jerusalem, he found that the apostles there weren't happy with him. "You went into a Gentile home, and even ate there? How could you do that?! And how could you think to baptize them?!" But after Peter told them the whole story, they understood. "Ah," someone said. "I now see that God's good news is even for the Gentiles!"

## Wondering Questions

I wonder what made Cornelius so interested in God in the first place?

I wonder why Peter was so quick to make the connection between eating unclean food in his vision and being able to go into Cornelius' house?

I wonder if Peter ever did eat a lobster or a pig? How about an eagle?