

Scripture Reading:

Acts 10: "27 And as [Peter] talked with Cornelius, he went in and found many who had come together. 28 Then he said to them, "You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. 29 Therefore I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?" "30 So Cornelius said, "Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, 31 and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God. 32 Send therefore to Joppa and call Simon here, whose surname is Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea. When he comes, he will speak to you.' 33 So I sent to you immediately, and you have done well to come. Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God." 34 Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. 35 But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. 36 The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ--He is Lord of all-- 37 that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: 38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. 39 And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. 40 Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, 41 not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. 42 And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead. 43 To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins." 44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. 45 And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. 46 For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, 47 "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" 48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days."

"Peter Preaches the Gospel"

This morning I want to talk with you about peace: Everything from world peace to individual peace! As I mentioned during my not-so-little rabbit trail sermon last week ...

- Today, we will focus on the message that Peter brought to the gathered Gentiles here at the home of Cornelius in Caesarea
- Next week, Lord willing, we will consider the reaction to this simple Gospel message.

The first thing that we see is that Peter has learned the lesson of his visions!

- Peter was not to call those unclean whom God has cleansed and we will see soon see God confirms that He has cleansed those who have gathered there at the home of Cornelius.

Peter says that "in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him!"

Now I want you to notice that if we said something like that today, in most Reformed and Evangelical circles we would be accused of preaching a false gospel, a gospel of works and not a gospel of grace!

They would rightly argue that only those who have exercised the gift of faith by repenting and turning to Jesus are justified and able to rightly fear God and do righteous works as part of their sanctification! Well, I hope that when we are finished today we will know that Peter is not saying they feared God because they were smarter than the other pagans in Rome and Peter is not saying they are accepted because they did some good works!

- **BUT we should also learn from Peter that we need not be afraid to proclaim what God does in the lives of those who respond to the Good News AND that God does so as He sees fit!**

I suspect a large part of our problem today with folks not properly fearing God nor understanding our call to do righteous works is rooted in a failure to tell people what we are calling them TO in the Gospel.

- **We are not giving them a better religion**
- **We are not giving them a better image of themselves**
- **We are not sharing a new life that will be peaches & cream and meet all of their “needs”**

When Jesus commands us to disciple the nations He is telling us that we are to bring in people who will fear Him and work righteousness.

- **As Peter says, those are the people who are accepted by God!**

So how do people who are born dead in their trespasses and sins do such a thing? That comes from the regeneration worked by the Holy Spirit where he exchanges the heart of stone with a heart of flesh which can now hear “the Word which God sent to the children of Israel” as Peter here proclaims...

- **A Word that would be warmly heard and received here at Caesarea**
- **A Word that has been heard and received down through the ages in all the nations of the earth as the Spirit of God fills the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus.**

And what is that Word?

- **Preaching peace through Jesus Christ: The Lord of all!**

Now Peter is going to explain very simply to those gathered how this peace was accomplished...

Before we consider these details we confront another problem we have in these modern times. Just as many misunderstand what we just outlined about fear and righteousness...

- **There is even more confusion today about the peace that Jesus brought!**

Since the 1960’s we have had the peaceniks, the grandmothers for peace and a host of bumper stickers telling us to make love not war and spelling peace with a variety of different religious symbols...

- **We have the ‘official’ peace sign which is back in fashion and talk of peace is everywhere.**

I think the world still lets us get away with so much public celebration of Christmas because the angels proclaimed peace on earth!

- **What is rightly understood in all of this is that the definition of peace is the absence of conflict**

What is seriously lacking is any consideration of how conflicts can be resolved so we can have peace. We are approaching the 70th birthday of John Lennon who wrote perhaps one of the most famous songs about the modern concept of peace. It was simply called Imagine If it is not a song you have been exposed to, you will in the coming weeks and you will certainly have opportunity to witness to many who live under its delusions today.

For Mr. Lennon, the way to world peace is to simply to imagine a world very different from the real world that we all must live in:

**Imagine there's no Heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us only sky
Imagine all the people
Living for today**

**Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion too
Imagine all the people
Living life in peace**

**Imagine no possessions
I wonder if you can
No need for greed or hunger
A brotherhood of man
Imagine all the people
Sharing all the world**

**You may say that I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will live as one**

There is a grain of truth in this subtle deception, as is often the case with Satan's lies: If there was no heaven or hell, then there would be no conflicts! IF man was god and he was perfect, then yes, we could all just get along!

- **But proclaiming that the Creator and His Holiness does not exist is not an option for us as mere creatures.**

The lyrics and tune sound enticing but they have no relation to the real world... I have often kidded on my porch that it would be interested to give one of those cars with the peace bumper stickers a good bump and see how peaceful their response is as they get out of their damaged car 😊

- **What is important for us to see this morning is that Peter goes on to share is how God has brought real peace.**

Not the false peace of the world, but real peace, for us as individuals and YES for the world. The angels were not lying when they proclaimed the birth of Jesus:

"10 Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. 11 For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: 14 "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

- **They brought a message of peace and it was for all the world and Peter is about to introduce this message to the Gentiles!**

Yes, peace is the absence of conflict, but that first requires a proper resolution to existing conflicts.

In the last generation we found ourselves as Americans in major conflict with the people of Germany and the people of Japan. After the bombing of Peril Harbor we had two paths toward peace to choose from: Surrender or War. On the path of surrender we would have avoided the many battles of the Pacific but peace would not have come until the spirit, will, and culture of the American people had been crushed and made subservient to the Emperor worship of Japan.

- **The path of war brought a lot of short term violence, but in the end we have now enjoyed a generation of peace between our nations.**

Many refuse to see such conflicts for what they are in history and without the regeneration of the Holy Spirit they certainly do not have eyes to see the greatest conflict of history:

- **The battle between the Seed of the Woman and the seed of the serpent!**
- **That conflict began in the garden of Eden and it will end with the final peace that Jesus brings upon His return.**

Those who struggle for world peace in worldly ways today are still made in God's image and thus have some understanding of the problem:

- **They are rightly appalled by the evil and death they see in men and the groaning and devastation evidenced in the very creation itself.**

What they refuse to see is the cause of these conflicts and thus they have all the wrong answers when it comes to resolving those conflicts. They refuse to hear God's revelation of Himself and the salvation of men, so in the end they constrain themselves to a world that must continue to be in conflict... They understand that man is the problem, think about how many of the Hollywood movies make this point, but they refuse to confront what the real problem of man is:

- **Sin resulting from their rebellion against God.**

It would be like the Japanese people in 1942 ignoring the fact that they bombed Peril Harbor and wondering why we were so upset!

- **There could be no peace without acknowledging the fact of that devastating bombing!**

Just as there was a great cost in our war with Japan, so there was a great cost for the peace that God brings to the world...

- **This is the Good News that Peter now brings to the Gentiles.**

And it is Good News indeed because the reign of sin has caused a lack of peace in SO many areas, not just between the nations of the world:

- **Sin separates us all as individuals from God**

Thus, history is full of religions and meditations and 'education' that has attempted fill what Augustine called a God-shaped vacuum within us all.

- **Sin separates us from each other**

This is why we struggle in our relationships, always looking for the perfect marriage or the right friend

- **Sin even separates us from ourselves**

We never find that quiet peace that we are always searching for.

- **It is in the midst of all these unsolvable conflicts that Peter brings them the offer of peace!**

Jesus had promised that He would bring life and life abundant and now Peter was being the witness of how this was accomplished. Peter gives a simple message that we will see in various ways throughout the Book of Acts, but always centering on the power of the resurrection!

- A simple message that we should never tire of hearing nor be slack in sharing with a lost world!

Peter speaks to the gathered Gentiles in this Roman world who would be not unlike many we would know today in our post-Christian nation:

- People who knew something about this man Jesus, and knowing that God had put a burden on their hearts, but not understanding how it all fits together.

Peter begins where the Angels did on the night of the Savior's birth:

Acts 10:36 "The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ-- He is Lord of all-- 37 that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: 38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him."

- Much of this they knew from local accounts, but now Peter will go on to be the witness that Jesus commanded the Disciples to be:

39 "And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree."

- Peter now knows the importance of the death of Jesus, a concept that he at first refused to consider
- He now understands that without this great sacrifice there would be no resolution of the conflicts and no peace!

40 "Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, 41 not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead."

- The resurrection of Jesus was a real resurrection confirming His victory over sin and death!

42 "And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead. 43 To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins."

- Just as God had promised in the garden the head of Satan, the seed of the serpent, had been crushed by the seed of the woman, Jesus!
- Jesus had come to save His people from their sins!
- Peter was the witness of this great victory for these Gentiles and we are to continue to be those witnesses today!

We must understand that war has been fought and won, the enemy subdued and there is peace as a result. And it will grow until Jesus returns as our victorious King!

Listen to how the Apostle Paul expounds on this in Romans five:

Romans 5:1 "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

- We are to KNOW that we have peace with God because of what Jesus has done!

- We are to know this peace so well, that the minor struggles that we still have in this world should not only NOT bother us, but be something we see as part of this great victory...

3 “And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; 4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. 6 For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. 10 For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.”

- Things have changed because of what Jesus did!

We NOW have peace with God: Knowing that the penalty for our sin has been paid and that we have access to the very throne room of God, able to cry ‘Abba Father!’ We NOW have peace with ourselves: Knowing that Jesus has made us new men and women, adopting us as His very children!

We NOW have peace in our relationships, knowing that God will sanctify our marriages and true friendships despite our many shortcomings if we are willing to bring them under His Lordship and know His love.

And we even know that Jesus has brought peace to the nations:

As we are faithful to the Great Commission we will see more and more nations bow the knee to Jesus bringing more and more peace in this world: We will see the fulfillment of the King’s dream in Daniel with the Kingdom of Jesus filling the whole earth!

- John Lennon did not know peace in this life and he certainly does not know peace today in the hell he tried to imagine away.

Ironically, he rejected and tried to imagine away the one who could bring the peace that he desired

- Jesus is the Prince of Peace because He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords who gave His own life for His people!

As we sang this morning: “Amazing love how can it be that thou my God shouldst die for me?”

We will see the response from these faithful Gentiles next week as God confirms His promise that His Son would bring peace to all the world. As we wait for that this week, our homework can be to make sure we have allowed Jesus to bring the peace that He offers into our lives...

- He will bring an end to so many conflicts if we are willing to cling to Him more than we do these conflicts!
- Do we believe that the Spirit of God is filling the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus?

That should give us great peace about all the messes that we see around us today: History is going exactly where God wants it to go!

- Paul assures the Corinthians that in the end ALL of the enemies of Jesus will be put under His feet in history!
- Do we believe that the Gospel of Peace changes how we relate one to another?

The peace that Jesus brings should impact us as a local congregation meeting each other’s needs and having beautiful relationships.

It should also impact our marriages which are to show the love that Jesus has for His Bride and impact how we treat each other in our families.

- If there is no peace in our families, or in our church and our relationships, then how is the world to know or believe Jesus has brought peace to the world?

And finally, have we allowed Jesus to bring real peace into our hearts?

Are we like these faithful gentiles who rightly served God and prayed and received what Peter had to say about Jesus with great joy?

Or are we like those unfaithful Jews who in their pride and selflessness ignored the commands of God and refused to hear what Peter proclaimed before their councils.

- Next week we will see these Gentiles baptized and asking Peter and his friend to stay for supper!
- In Jerusalem we saw the Jews rush at Stephen with a great rage casting him outside the city for stoning.

Quite a contrast, but we will ultimately be in one camp or the other...

- God has called us as Gentiles out of darkness and into His light: From conflict into great peace.
- If you have resisted this call in the flesh then you need to repent and believe!
- If you have responded to this call in faith then rejoice with great joy!
- And as you do, meditate often on these words from the Apostle Paul to the Saints in Ephesus:

Eph. 2:11 "Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh--who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands-- 12 that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, 15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, 16 and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. 17 And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. 18 For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. 19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone, 21 in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit."

Communion Meditation: John 6:

"Then they said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" 29 Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent." 30 Therefore they said to Him, "What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do? 31 Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.' " 32 Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. 33 For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." 34 Then they said to Him, "Lord, give us this bread always." 35 And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. "