



Acts 10:1-11

Our story begins with two strangers.

One of the strangers is a man named Cornelius. Cornelius is a soldier. Cornelius is a good man who gives to the poor and prays to the one God. But Cornelius is not Jewish, like Jesus was. Cornelius is a Gentile, which is just a fancy way of saying “not Jewish”.

Jewish people have special rules about the foods they eat and the way they celebrate the Sabbath. Gentiles don't follow those rules, even if they pray to the same One God. Many of the early Christians believed that a Gentile would have to learn to be Jewish first, before they could become a Christian.

The other stranger is Peter. Peter was one of the twelve disciples who lived with Jesus. After the Ascension, when Jesus returned to Heaven, Peter became very important in the new Church. Because Peter was Jewish, and Jesus was Jewish, Peter thought that it was important to follow all of the Jewish rules in order to become a Christian.

These are the two strangers God brings together- Peter and Cornelius. God brings them together with visions.

One afternoon, Cornelius has a vision of an angel of God. The angel tells Cornelius that God has noticed the good works Cornelius does. The angel tells Cornelius to send men to Joppa where a man named Peter is staying and to bring Peter back to Cornelius. Peter does as the angel says, even though he has never even heard of this Peter before.

The next day, Peter has a vision of Heaven opening up and sending a sheet of animals to earth. These animals are the kind of meat that Jewish rules forbid. In his vision, a voice tells Peter to eat this forbidden meat. Three times Peter says that eating this meat is against his rules. Three times the visions send the Gentile food back to Peter and tells him that God has made the food clean.

Peter starts to think that God means that Gentiles can receive the Holy Spirit and become Christians. Not every Christian needs to follow the Jewish rules.

Now, the men that Cornelius sent arrive at Peter's house. The voice in Peter's vision tells him to go with the men. Peter and some of his friends walk a whole day to Cornelius. When they arrive, Cornelius tells Peter about his vision. Cornelius and his family and friends are eager to learn from Peter, but they are Gentiles. A Jewish man like Peter would not go into a Gentile house or eat their food.

But Peter goes inside. Peter talks to Cornelius about Jesus and about what Jesus has taught. Peter talks to Cornelius about the Resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

While Peter is talking, the Holy Spirit comes down to Cornelius and his family and friends. The men and women with Peter can hardly believe it! God is sending the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles!

Peter baptizes the Gentile Christians with water, in the same way that he has been baptizing the Jewish Christians. Peter is sure now that his vision from God means that the Good News of Jesus is for everyone and that the gift of the Holy Spirit is what brings Christians together, not the rules that they follow.

God brings strangers together in the Holy Spirit, even now, like Peter and Cornelius came together through God's visions.

