



Acts 11:1-18 They're Not Dirty; God's Made 'Em Clean 9/30 - 10/2
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Greeting: ¹⁴ <Christ Jesus> is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,

Good morning. I'm Joel Sutton, and I am very blessed. First of all, because in Christ, God has made a dirty rotten sinner like me: clean. **(Image #1- Guanajuato)** Also, I get to serve as a WELS missionary to Latin America stationed in Mexico. A city called Guanajuato, about 4 hours from Mexico City. So not the beach, not the border.

So you've heard about the earthquakes right? **(Image 2a-Show briefly)** Almost 500 dead from these earthquakes. Thousands with no homes, and no jobs. Here's a picture from a state called Oaxaca.

(Image #2b- Bridge in Oaxaca)

Bridge is all broken and twisted, no way to get across. Separated from the people on the other side. Earthquakes really make a mess of things. So does sin... Everything gets messy, broken down, collapsed, twisted, and we get separated from people... like a broken bridge. One category of sin in particular does that... Let's figure out what it is:

Acts 11:1-3 The apostles and the believers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. ² So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him ³ and said, "You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them."

Pause there for a second: So who's this Gentile, non-Jew that Peter was eating with? **(Image 3-Centurion)** There was this centurion- we're talking Roman soldiers, leader of a group of around 100 soldiers.

This centurion's name is Cornelius. Italian. Good dude. 7 centurions in the Bible and they're all pretty good guys. Some of them we'll see in heaven. Cornelius fears God, along with his whole family, prays, and is very generous with people, even the Jewish people. Only one problem. He's not Jewish. He is not circumcised. He doesn't eat Kosher...

Cornelius is praying and an angel says, "The Lord has heard you. Send for a guy named Simon Peter in Joppa. Here's the Google map so you can find him. He'll tell you what to do." So Cornelius sends some guys to get Peter.

Peter, meanwhile is about 40 kilometers away. N.Ulm to Mankato. In a town called Joppa, praying on the roof. We pick up the story in Acts 11:4

⁴ **Starting from the beginning, Peter told them the whole story:**⁵ *"I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. ⁶ I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles and birds. ⁷ Then I heard a voice telling me, 'Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.'*

⁸ *"I replied, 'Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.'*

⁹ *“The voice spoke from heaven a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’* ¹⁰ *This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again.*

¹¹ *“Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying.* ¹² *The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them.*

So the next day, it's noon. Peter's on the roof praying. He's in a trance and sees a vision:

(Image #4- The Sheet)

Kill and eat. “I can't eat that! You know me. I never do that. ” This needs a little explaining. In the OT, God had given them rules about what to eat and not eat. Kosher.

- Venison- good.
- Jaeger Schnitzel (pork)... No.
- Bacon... Nope. Unless it's turkey bacon
- Grasshopper tacos. Good.
- Crab. Shrimp. Nope.

This was a way for God to set aside his people as different. But when Jesus came, he said all foods are fair game. So just to make sure no one leaves church unclear, “All foods are clean now.”

Do not call anything impure that God has made clean. 3 times it happens. The vision's over. And just then there's a knock at the door. It's three Romans, three Gentiles, looking for Peter. It's not about food, it's about people.

Have you ever called anyone dirty? I do not come from a racist family. But I did hear racial slurs. Racially loaded jokes. I learned at least one racial slur for every skin color and continent. I probably even laughed at a few jokes. And more than a few of them had the word, “Dirty” at the front. That's not just for others, even for my own race we have a term, “White trash.”

I don't have to tell you that racial tension is kind of a big deal here within the US. People don't trust each other, even the police, sometimes.

But also on a global level. One country wants to totally destroy another. Talk of building walls- whatever your opinion may be- it gives people the impression that they aren't welcome.

What about in churches? For sure, it's an issue in bigger cities. Look, I don't think this is a racist church. There are no pointy, white hats in the back office here.

Yes, as I look out today, it's mostly white folks. New Ulm is 97% white.

(Source: <http://maps.nazarene.org/DemographicsNazarene/culture.html?y=5513557.028401688&x=-10515123.902238108&b=7>)

This summer I was in New Ulm, and I noticed a few African American families. I went to Wal-Mart and felt right at home, I saw Natives and people were speaking Spanish. Go to Mankato. Even Sleepy Eye. Especially the Twin Cities. You may be the minority. The world is coming to MN.

Many of you are going to live out somewhere else that's not so mono-cultural, especially MLC students. God may put you somewhere as a teacher or church leader where the people look different.

But the truth is we are largely a mono-cultural congregation in a mono-cultural church body. WELS convention: I didn't see a lot of color there. I don't think we are a racist church body... We know God loves people. All people.

But the problem may be this: We expect people to be like us... in order to join us. They have to like our music, our style, our schedule. We welcome people from other cultures and socio-economic backgrounds- the poor, the people from a different country or skin color, but then sometimes we expect them to become German Lutherans, instead of followers of Christ. The inflexibility of our church's culture can easily become an obstacle to the Gospel of Jesus.

This is the problem that the early church was facing. Yea, you Gentiles can worship our God. But you gotta eat like us. Get circumcised. And then we'll let you in... at least into the outer court. You're a 2nd class citizen.

The Holy Spirit schools Peter. His big lesson is: Don't call dirty what God has made clean. 3 Italians knock on the door. The Spirit told Peter, "Go with them." Something interesting happens... he lets them in his house. They stay overnight at the house. Wait..

And now Peter has crossed a line. Peter's taking some heat, some criticism. He has welcomed Gentiles into his house and he's going to go and eat with them? A little leadership moment or Christian wisdom moment. When Christians are criticizing you, it doesn't always mean that you are wrong. Sometimes they are wrong.

Don't call dirty what God has made clean. Oh, I know you feel dirty. God could dig up the dirt on you. God could dig up dirt on me. He throws repentance back at us.

¹²The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man's house. ¹³He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, 'Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. ¹⁴He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.'

¹⁵"As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. ¹⁶Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' ¹⁷So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God's way?"

¹⁸When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life."

A message that saves whole households. What message? Jesus Christ was anointed the Christ for all people. Jesus Christ was not a racist, he healed Jews and non-Jews. He preached to his own people, and people that were NOT like him. Romans. Samaritans. They killed him- Jews and Gentiles together, hung him up on a cross. He's alive and we saw him. And everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness.

Most religions of the world are kinda jealous. The Mexicans want the Virgen de Guadalupe **Image** to be their goddess. Why? It's distinctly Mexican. Apaches hold on tightly to their traditional religion. Why? It's just for them.

Jesus Christ is Jewish. You're not a Jew, are you? And yet he crosses that tribal line, and gives you, Not-a-Jew repentance and eternal life. Our God is not a tribal God. Thank God because this is an all-tribes salvation.

Even to Gentiles. Even to Mexicans. Latinos. Even to Apaches. Even to you. Your household.

Not just salvation, Holy Spirit. So the Gentiles begin to speak in tongues proving they had received the Holy Spirit. The lightbulb goes on for Peter, and for the hard-core believers. They have the Spirit, too.

So a big debate arose among the missionaries in Apacheland. 100 years, there had only been a handful of Apache pastors. Can Apaches be pastors, too?

(Image 5- Kirk and Gary.)

Kirk and Gary. Same Holy Spirit. They preach the gospel, Lutheran-flavor to their people in their own way.

(Image 6- Henry) Academia Cristo- we do the same thing. We offer Biblical training for people in 18 different countries. In the days of the Lutheran Reformation, they took advantage of the newly invented printing press to get the word out as fast as possible. Today, we use digital media, Facebook, Whatsapp, Smartphones, online classes to connect as many people as possible to the grace of Christ and then they go. Gathering little house mission-groups, spreading the gospel in the streets, in jails, or in organized established churches, like this one.

It all points back to one message: Repent of your sins. Eternal life in Jesus. 500 years ago this month a guy wrote: "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent', he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."

At the end of the day: All human beings inherently are the same. All human beings are extremely different. We all sin. We're all broken by sin. We put up our walls to keep people out and to keep from loving them... But by his cross, Christ has destroyed those walls.

Ephesians 2:14-15 For <Christ> himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace,

Jesus is the wall smasher. There's no more us and them. God used this experience with Cornelius to open Peter's eyes. "Now I know..." I sat in a car with a Peruvian, a Chilean, a Mexican... and a Gringo. "Now I know..."

By God's grace, WELS is in fellowship with church bodies in 31 different countries. By God's grace even here in New Ulm you have opportunities to stand together with people from all over the world and worship Jesus.

God uses mission trips. God uses people and experiences that prove to us, the Holy Spirit has been given to all people. Most of all, it's Jesus.

Now I know. Now you do too. Don't call em dirty. Jesus has made them clean. He's made you clean, too. Amen.