

January 9, 2005
Baptism of Our Lord

"Peace in Jesus is for All People"

Acts 10:34-38

Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism ³⁵ but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right. ³⁶ You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. ³⁷ You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached-- ³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

Are you afraid of catching the disease of polio? The kids here this morning are asking themselves, "Polio, what is polio? I have never heard of that disease." If you grew up in the 1950's polio was always on your mind because kids around you were catching this disease and dying, or they became crippled for the rest of their lives.

Then a cure was found. A man in San Diego, named Jonas Salk discovered a vaccine for polio. Kids lined up in schools across this country to receive their shots. What a shame it would have been if this vaccine were prepared only for the people of San Diego. Instead it has been shared with people all over the world.

In the early Christian church, the Jewish Christians living in Jerusalem were reluctant to take the blessings of salvation in Christ and share them with other people who were not Jews. Even Jesus' chosen disciples felt more comfortable taking the message of peace in Jesus to other Jews.

We can relate to what these early Christians were experiencing. We have people in our families, in our neighborhood, and among our circle of friends who do not know about the peace in Jesus that we have. We are so thankful and comfortable with the peace we share with other Christians, the prayers we have together, and the love, that we easily can put off the difficult task of bringing Christ to those who are without hope. This morning we want to speak to you on this subject, so relevant for every day of our lives in this new year, **"Peace in Jesus is for All People."**

1) That's what Jesus wants his church to see

It is interesting to watch how our Lord and Savior directs his church as he sits in glory at the right hand of his heavenly Father. In Acts 10 we read how Peter is given a vision from the Lord. A large sheet comes down from heaven with all sorts of animals in it. He hears the Lord tell him to eat the animals. Peter responds by saying he cannot eat these animals because some of them were unclean. Perhaps there was even a pig among the animals that he had seen. Then the voice of the Lord spoke to him and said, "Do not call anything impure that God has made unclean."

At the same time that Peter received this vision, an angel of the Lord visited a man named Cornelius, a Roman centurion, living in Joppa along the seacoast. It says that this man was god fearing and he gave generously to people in need, and prayed to the true God. He was an Italian who had converted to Judaism. The Lord told him to go to a certain place in Joppa and bring Peter to his home. When Peter came to the home of Cornelius, he found it full of people waiting to hear about Jesus. It was the opportunity of a lifetime. The Lord Jesus had greased the skids and opened the door to make it easier for Peter to start talking to Gentiles about Jesus

The words just read to you this morning were an introduction to the sermon that Peter preached to this crowd in the home of Cornelius. Peter began by saying, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right." Peter said, "Now I realize...." Does it not strike us as strange that it took this long to get the big picture of what Jesus wanted his church to be doing? Didn't Jesus clearly tell the disciples to "preach the gospel to every creature," and go out "into the world" and be witnesses "to the ends of the world?" Before you and I become too critical of these disciples, let's remember how easy it is for us to slip into our comfort zone and lose sight of bringing the peace we have in Jesus to all people.

Peter told this crowd of Gentiles gathered in the home of Cornelius that God does not show favoritism. That word in the original language has the thought of not judging someone by their face. Today our country struggles whether to profile people who come through our airports on the basis of what type of face they have. The Lord our God does not judge people by their faces, or their color of skin, or their age, or their intelligence level when it comes to bringing the blessings that we have come to know in Jesus our Savior. The words of Scripture are so clear. "The Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

This morning I want to ask you the important question, "Do you fit the profile of a person who needs Jesus?" What really lies behind your face whatever color the skin may be, or whether that face is smiling or sad, or whether it does not have a wrinkle on it, or it has many wrinkles? Behind every face and every human being on this earth lies a heart and mind that is corrupted by sin and in need of Jesus to be at peace with God.

When you travel through the airport, the transportation security people can profile you and determine whether you might be a greater risk to safety than other people. They can also take your bags and pass them through screen that reveals what is inside your luggage. Metal detectors determine if you are carrying a knife in your pocket. Our God judges all people not on the basis of what is on the face, but what is in the heart. Romans 3 says, "Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism." The terrorist who blows up people with bombs and ball bearings on his body, and the husband who fails to love his wife as much as Christ loved his church, and kids you fight with brothers and sisters and say, "I hate you," all fall under God's judgment. Romans 3 says, "There is no difference. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."

That same great verse of the Bible goes on to say that there is no favoritism in our God when he provides a rescue from sin. "All have sinned, but all have been freely justified by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." John 3:16 does not say, "God so loved people with white skin, or dark skin, or brown skin, that he gave his only begotten

Son... No it says clearly, "God so loved the world...." The Gentiles sitting beneath Peter in Joppa were just as important to the Lord as the Jews who sat and listened to him sermons in Jerusalem.

Our text says so clearly that God accepts men (people) "from every nation who fear him and do what is right." God wants people to fear him or respect him especially in their attitude toward his plan that to rescue people. When we stood in line to receive our shots for polio, some kids howled and screamed. For 8 and 9 year old boys it was a test of future manhood not to shed a tear. No kids in that line every said that Jonas Salk was a fool for providing people the miracle cure for polio. Yet a world full of people believe that preaching of the cross is foolishness. They do not want to give God the ultimate respect and fear by believing in his plan to rescue them. When people believe in this rescue plan as you do, you want to do what is right, not to earn eternal life, but to say thanks to your God for rescuing you.

God gave this message of peace and salvation in Jesus to the people of Israel, but he wanted them to share this with the Gentiles. Peter told the people in the home of Cornelius how clear that was to him now. "You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus, who is Lord of all. The message came to the Jews, it came to shepherds on the fields of Bethlehem, and to the apostles who heard Jesus say, "Peace be to you" on the night of Jesus resurrection. Wise men came from the East to worship Jesus, led by the Star. Prophecy after prophecy in Isaiah spoke about Israel taking what it had in Jesus and sharing it with the world. In Isaiah 60 Israel is told by the Lord, "Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn."

January 9, 2005. Why are you still here? Wasn't the world supposed to come to an end in the year 2000? Why has the Lord put off the day of his return? Why are you still alive? Why has he not called you home to heaven? Peter has the answer for us in the words he spoke to these people gathered in the home of Cornelius. "How true it is that God does not show favoritism." The good news of peace in Jesus still needs to be shared with all people. Jesus can open the eyes of 21st century Christians living in Santa Maria as he opened the eyes of Christians in the first century living in Jerusalem. He can help us look at people and see them in need of Jesus, even though they seem to have it made in all other areas of their lives.

2) That's what we see in Jesus

To strengthen his case even more Peter points to the example of Jesus' own ministry. "You know what happened has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee, after the baptism that John preached- how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of devil because God was with him."

The baptism of Jesus took place at a certain place and time. It happened on the banks of the Jordan River. Jesus had a specific moment and specific place when the Holy Spirit descended upon him and the Father said, "This is my Son whom I love." What happened at a certain place and time in history has world- wide implications. The ministry of Jesus was not just for the Jews. It is for all people. He lived a perfect life 33 years in the land

of Judea. He made the perfect sacrifice for the sin of the world at a specific time and place outside of Jerusalem. His resurrection provides the hope of escaping the judgment to come, and overcoming Satan and death. It is for all people. John the Baptist introduced Jesus with these famous words, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world?"

When the large tsunami hit the beaches of Indonesia, one little girl was credited with saving the lives of over one hundred people. She had just studied about tsunamis in school, and when she saw the water receding and the fish flopping on the sand, she yelled "tsunami." Over a hundred people made it to safety because one girl used her voice to warn others. What if the Lord could use your voice and mine to talk to a hundred people who don't know Jesus and share with them the peace we have in him this coming year. That would make this year, 2005, one of the best years in our lives. Amen.