

Crossroads Daily Guide
Week of July 10, 2016
The Founding Story



There are pivotal moments in our Christian story when God's interaction with humankind brought about changes of direction and focus for the people living out our biblical story. God's call to Moses to lead his people out of slavery in Egypt was such a moment as was God's interaction with Abraham. The coming of Jesus into our world was the most important of these pivotal moments because Jesus revealed a truer vision of God's love for us. He taught that love for God, neighbor and self was far more important than following all the laws that had been handed down through the generations. Jesus expanded peoples' views of how we can best share God's love in the world, teaching that the worship which truly honors God is to work for justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly before God. This expanded view forever changed the way Christianity would spread through the world.

This week's story of Peter's extraordinary vision to share the message of Jesus beyond his own community was one of the most important turning points in our Christian story. Because of his vision, and his courage to act on that vision, the teachings of Jesus spread far beyond a small group of Jewish believers, rippling outward to the whole world!

Sunday, July 10 2016

Scripture: *2 Peter 1:10 Therefore, brothers and sisters, be eager to confirm your call and election. Do this and you will never lose your way.*

Reflection: Have you ever felt the call of God through the work of the Holy Spirit in your life? We may think that a "spiritual calling" only happens to ministry professionals or people whose lives are immersed in the work of the church. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Jesus invites you to see your own life as having the potential to change the world through relationships of love and grace. As you grow on your journey inward, together and outward, you will see more fully God's unfolding call in your life. Reflect back on your week. Did you see or hear about something that tugged at your heart, or caused you to wonder if there was some way you might make a difference in the world? This is one of the ways God's Spirit whispers to us. Throughout this week try to be open to these nudges of spirit that might be part of an emerging call in your life.

Breath Prayer: *(Inhale) Open my ears... (Exhale) to hear your gentle voice.*

Monday July 11, 2016

Scripture: *Acts 11:1-3 Soon the news reached the apostles and other believers in Judea that the Gentiles had received the word of God. But when Peter arrived back in Jerusalem, the Jewish believers criticized him.*

Reflection: Jesus invites you to see your life as having the potential to change the world through relationships of love and grace. Regardless of the specifics of your own call, we are all called to one central truth; God loves us unconditionally, Jesus practiced the unlimited welcome of all people, and calls us to do the same. This is the central message we have to share with the world. By doing so we affirm our unwavering hope that we can all be transformed by God's open-armed welcoming love. This is the way of Jesus. Is there a person whom you find difficult to love unconditionally? If so, spend a few moments imaging how Jesus might have interacted with that person. Is it possible for you see that person through Jesus' loving and welcoming eyes?

Breath Prayer: *(Inhale) Open my eyes... (Exhale) to see all people through Your loving eyes.*

Tuesday July 12, 2016

Scripture: Acts 10: 4-9 *They accused him, "You went into the home of the uncircumcised and ate with them!" Step-by-step, Peter explained what had happened. "I was in the city of Joppa praying when I had a visionary experience. In my vision, I saw something like a large linen sheet being lowered from heaven by its four corners. It came all the way down to me. As I stared at it, wondering what it was, I saw four-legged animals—including wild beasts—as well as reptiles and wild birds. I heard a voice say, 'Get up, Peter! Kill and eat!' I responded, 'Absolutely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' The voice from heaven spoke a second time, 'Never consider unclean what God has made pure.'*

Reflection: Peter knew Jesus intimately and walked with him from the time Jesus first called him to leave his fishing nets and follow him. Peter loved Jesus, but Jesus told Peter, "If you love me, feed my sheep." It seemed strange to the Jewish believers that Peter, of all people, would go off and eat with gentiles (all non-Jewish people), sharing meals with them and teaching them about God's love. It may have seemed like a betrayal of Jesus and his teaching. Peter was no doubt confused by his visions. But they were so powerful, so pure and convincing, that he changed the course of his life to follow this vision. It turned his life upside down. It flipped everything he had previously thought about the good news of Jesus. Still, he quickly grabbed on to this expansive and inclusive new view of God's love and began the work of sharing it far beyond his community and his comfort zone. Have you ever thought of our faith story as being intended only for certain groups of people? How might your actions be different if you felt called by God to share unconditional love and grace with all people, everywhere?

Breath Prayer: *(Inhale) Open my eyes... (Exhale) to see new possibilities for sharing Your love.*

Wednesday July 13, 2016

Scripture: Acts 10: 10-14 *This happened three times, then everything was pulled back into heaven. At that moment three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea arrived at the house where we were staying. The Spirit told me to go with them even though they were Gentiles. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered that man's house. He reported to us how he had seen an angel standing in his house and saying, 'Send to Joppa and summon Simon, who is known as Peter. He will tell you how you and your entire household can be saved.'*

Reflection: One of the most interesting aspects of this story is that as Peter was having his own vision and hearing God's voice calling him to specific action, the spirit was already at work in the family to whom Peter was called. The way was prepared for him before he even got there. Peter saw this as confirmation of his vision. It was no longer something he might have imagined. God's call was confirmed when he learned that God was already working to prepare the hearts of the gentile family. That is a pretty amazing concept, isn't it? But, people who are called by the gentle urging of spirit and have the courage to act on their call, often report that they experience this kind of confirmation. God has already gone before them, preparing the way. What seems like a radical idea suddenly takes on deeper meaning as God's partnership is revealed. Have you ever experienced such a confirmation in your own life? Spend some quiet time reflecting on how God might be calling you from reflection to action?

Breath Prayer: *(Inhale) Open my heart... (Exhale) to love more deeply.*

Thursday July 14, 2016

Scripture: Acts 10: 15-17 *When I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them, just as the Spirit fell on us in the beginning. I remembered the Lord's words: 'John will baptize with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' If God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, then who am I? Could I stand in God's way?*

Reflection: Peter must have been astonished to see the power of God's spirit revealed to these Gentiles the same way he had experienced it on the Day of Pentecost. There could be no greater confirmation that God's love was truly unconditional and God's welcome was truly unlimited! Peter says, "If God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, then who am I? Could I stand in God's way?" What a perfect response, and so encouraging to us, reminding us that our own opinions of who is worthy or unworthy are meaningless. It is not our right to judge or have our own ideas of other peoples' worthiness to receive God's great love and mercy. God has already decided. Everyone is worthy, without exception. Our mandate is

to grow in love and understanding so that we can become people who extend the same love and grace to all. Go back and read today's scripture.

Breath Prayer: *(Inhale) Open my arms... (Exhale) to become the unlimited welcome of Jesus.*

Friday July 15, 2016

Scripture: *Acts 10:18 Once the apostles and other believers heard this, they calmed down. They praised God and concluded, "So then God has enabled Gentiles to change their hearts and lives so that they might have new life."*

Reflection: What a beautiful resolution to this story. It starts with finger-pointing and accusations aimed toward Peter, and ends with greater understanding and willingness to accept this new understanding of their faith. This was truly expansive Christianity, flexing, growing and changing to become more inclusive. They realized that God's love was greater than they previously imagined it to be. This is an ancient story, but so very relevant to us today as Christianity struggles with who to accept and who to exclude from the table of Christ. Jesus made it clear, God made it clear, by calling Peter to reach beyond the church of his day to include everyone. Our role is to be committed to the unwavering hope that we can all change and grow to become more like Jesus. That is true transformation.

Breath Prayer: *(Inhale) Open my heart... (Exhale) to love as You love.*

Saturday July 16, 2016

Scripture: *Psalms 27:11 Lord, teach me your ways...*

Reflection: This simple, heartfelt prayer is a good one for us to hold deep in our hearts. To learn God's ways means to abandon some of our own when they are in conflict with God's ways. As you remain open to hearing God's call in your own life, take some time to reflect on these questions. What is arising within me that is awakening my heart and mind? What causes do I care about – things that get my creative juices flowing? What situation in the community or the world upsets me or makes my blood boil? What place of pain in my own story intersects with the places of pain in the world? The answers to these questions may help you discover God's call to maximize your potential to change the world through relationships of love and grace.

Breath Prayer: *(Inhale) Lord... (Exhale) teach me Your ways.*