

Week of May 20-26

STILL MORE UNEXPECTED

Scripture Reading: Read Acts chapter 10

If we have learned anything from the past couple of devotions, it's that God often acts in unexpected ways, to reach unexpected people in unexpected places. Philip connects with a eunuch on a desert road and the church in Ethiopia exists today because of that unexpected encounter. The Lord reaches Saul on the road to Damascus and turns the church's greatest persecutor into its greatest proclaimer. Unexpected! In today's chapter reading, we find yet another unexpected event from the hand of God; an event that left Peter and his traveling companions shocked and in awe of God's powerful grace.

It all started with a vision. Peter saw a sheet come down from heaven filled with all kinds of beasts, both clean and unclean. He hears a voice telling him to rise and eat. Peter protests. He's been kosher his whole life. Never touched a B.L.T. sandwich or had barbecued pork! The voice concludes with the admonition to Peter not to call impure what God has called clean. The vision repeats itself two more times. Peter's left scratching his head trying to figure out what on earth is going on. He was a little slow to pick up on God's visual aids. Fortunately, the Spirit made his direction clear for this dense disciple: "*Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.*" The next day, Peter traveled with the three men and he wisely took a few witnesses along for good measure. They would come in handy later to verify the unexpected event that was to occur with Cornelius (a centurion from the Italian Regiment) and his family and friends.

When Peter arrived at the house, he made it clear that although what he was doing wasn't kosher (i.e. Jews associating with Gentiles or visiting them) God was in it and he wanted to know why they asked for him. Cornelius informs him that they were there in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord had commanded Peter to tell them. Peter was shocked. Gentiles wanting to hear the gospel? It was certainly not what Peter was expecting based on how he responded to Cornelius: "*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.*" But, once realizing that God's grace was intended for an even larger audience than Peter expected, he began to preach. What happened next was even more unexpected though. As they believed the good news that Peter was preaching, the Holy Spirit was poured out on Cornelius and those gathered there and they began to speak in other tongues. Other tongues? Just like at Pentecost? On Gentiles? No one saw that one coming based on the response of Peter's companions, "*The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles.*" Astonished. Even on the Gentiles. Still more unexpected events from an amazing God as the gospel jumps the barrier from Jew to Gentile!

Action Step & Prayer Focus: Have you limited God to your finite expectations of Him? Do you realize He is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us? Pray that God enlarges your vision to believe him for the impossible and the unexpected He longs to do in order that He might be glorified.

Take-a-way: *When you serve the amazing God of wonders, expect the unexpected.*