

Good News of the Resurrection Reaches the Outside World; Acts 10:34-43

Introduction: The reason we celebrate Easter is that it says to the world that death is not the end and that for those who put their trust in Jesus it marks the beginning of eternal life. As Jesus said, 'Because I live, you shall live also'.

How appropriate then that one of the readings set down for today tells the story of when this great news was first proclaimed to non-Jewish people, namely the Roman centurion, Cornelius, his family and friends; Acts 10:34-43.

We don't readily appreciate what a revolutionary step this was because we don't live in a society where Jews and Gentiles hardly have anything to do with each other. In those days Jews thought of Gentiles as unclean, and Gentiles thought of Jews as a troublesome and stuck-up community who wouldn't fit in.

How Peter broke out of this exclusivist attitude is explained in Acts 10. It took a dream about God telling him to eat 'unclean' food to make him realise that *no one* is unclean in God's eyes and that non-Jewish people should be able to hear the good news of Jesus, not just the Jews; Acts 10:9-23.

It also took a vision from God to impel Cornelius to send servants to the town of Joppa to bring Peter up to Caesarea to hear what he had to tell them; Acts 10: 1-8.

Good News of the Resurrection Reaches the Outside World; Acts 10:34-43

When Peter and his companions arrived at Caesarea he was greeted by Cornelius, his family and a house-full of his Gentile friends. What Peter said to them highlights what a very delicate situation it was; Acts 10: 28, 'Peter said to them, "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean, so when I was sent for, I came ..."

Now we come to the section set down as our reading today; Acts 10 verses 34 to 43. What we have here is the first official proclamation of the gospel to the Gentile world.

We start with verse 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.' This suggests that people like Cornelius had a general idea about the person, who until recently had travelled around preaching and healing, and who had then been executed by *his* boss, Pontius Pilate.

What he didn't know was the astonishing claim that this Jesus was *Lord of all*, meaning Lord of Caesar as well.

Next Peter proceeds to give his audience a thumb nail sketch of the things that Jesus did; verse 37-38, 'You know what 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 the devil, because God was with him.'

Good News of the Resurrection Reaches the Outside World; Acts 10:34-43

Biblical scholars have made the point that this story, and what he says next, follows very closely the outline and order of Mark's Gospel, which, according to early tradition was based on Peter's own memoirs.

Then Peter moved to the central events of the gospel, what we call today, the Easter Story; Acts 10: 39-41, 'We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen – by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.'

This reference to eating and drinking with him is important to show that Jesus was not a ghost but a real human being, one who had been dead for three days and had been brought back to physical life.

Last comes the punchline, that is, what the hearer is supposed to *do* about the death, resurrection and glorious ascension of Jesus and the promise of his return to judge the living and the dead. Verse 43 says, 'All the prophets testify about him that everyone who *believes* in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.'

That invitation to receive forgiveness and eternal life is the very essence of the Easter message. We all can start again with God, the past being set aside and life forever lived in the full light of God's presence and power.

**Good News of the Resurrection Reaches the Outside World;
Acts 10:34-43**

As for the response of Cornelius and his friends, what followed next was very unusual but similar to what happened on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was first poured out on the Jewish hearers when Peter proclaimed the gospel to them for the first time; verse 44, 'While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out *even* on the Gentiles.'

It appears that the special manifestation of the Holy Spirit to Cornelius and his friends was to mark God's absolute pleasure that the gospel of Jesus was now going to reach out beyond the Jewish people to the entire world.

From that day, nearly 2,000 years ago, the world was changed forever and we are the descendants of those first Gentile believers.

What this means for us is this: if we already believe in our heart that Jesus died for our sins and rose from the dead, we, like Cornelius and his friends have already received forgiveness for our sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit within us and eternal life with Jesus in heaven.

If by chance there are some here today who haven't yet made the choice that Cornelius and his friends made that day, what better day to do it than Easter Day 2017.

Just as God answered their trust with forgiveness, so he will answer yours in the same way and this Easter will definitely be the best day you will ever have.