

## A Revolutionary Intimacy

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Acts 11:1-3

**Acts 11:1** Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God.<sup>2</sup> So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him,<sup>3</sup> saying, "Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?"

I am in the process of writing a commentary on the books of Acts, something every theologian should do, but what no theologian should ever want to do. I am learning so much about the foundations of Christian identity through all the incredible surprises I am finding in this book. I draw your attention to these slender verses of scripture from chapter eleven.

Peter in this segment of the story is being asked a question. This question is as important as any question Peter was ever asked in scripture. Just as important as "Who do people say that I am?" Just as crucial as the question, "Peter, do you love me?" This question however does not come from the mouth of Jesus. This question comes from very upset and angry Jewish followers of Jesus. "Why did you go to the uncircumcised and eat with them?"

Peter had violated the protocols of holy living and torah faithfulness. He had gone into the Goyim and broken bread with gentiles. This question comes in the middle of what is nothing less than a revolutionary work of the Spirit. But Peter was a very reluctant revolutionary. He says in effect, I did not want to do this, but the Spirit made me do this. He is not alone. In the book of Acts almost no one in any kind of leadership is ever doing what they want to do. They are all being compelled by the Spirit to follow the Spirit's desire, divine desire.

Peter recounts what had brought him to this question being asked of him now. He had gone onto the roof to pray, exercising his piety in beautiful and deep ways, and while he was praying he became hungry. It was precisely at this moment when his piety met his hunger, that we see the exquisite timing of God. God approached Peter at the height of his hunger and at that moment comes this sheet.

The sheet was filled with foods that a pious believing Jewish person would not eat. In fact, such a person would have had their taste so formed as to look on those animals on that sheet with revulsion. Yet God lowered this sheet, and said to Peter the unthinkable – Peter rise, kill, and eat. A struggle followed, yes, a holy struggle in which Peter *resisted the will of God and the way of the Spirit*. But this is precisely the point. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. This struggle was created by God.

At that moment the work of God was trying to change the desire of Peter, draw his desire in a new direction toward that which he would have found completely unnatural and against the will of God. It is this transformation of desire, the opening of desire toward someone else - this is the new thing. It is about eating, because what you eat you become and what you desire to eat is what you desire to have and hold, and take into yourself without fear.

*God is about desire before God is about demand.* God is about aesthetics before God is about ethics. Love and life are God's weapons of choice. The sheet was everything. At the sheet, God was overturning worlds. At the sheet, God was saying to Peter if you love me, desire what I desire, desire who I desire.

So Peter recounts this work of the Spirit, and the other apostles and the believers were silent. Something had come to an end and something was about to begin. That silence was like the space between one musical movement and the beginning of another.

This story has been called the story of gentile inclusion. But that is such a poor way to designate a revolution, a revolution in what we understand God to be about in this world. Here at this moment the door has been created and opened for us Gentiles to enter in, but we are yet to grasp the scandalous power of when and where we enter.

You see we were on the sheet. The revolting, nasty, distasteful, unholy things on that sheet – that was us. We were the very thing that no faithful servant of Israel's God would want to touch. No relations, no association, no communion. That was us. We enter in exactly in the space and in the place of the not wanted, the repulsive.

We ride in on the plea of God saying to the disciples, “take them, desire them, touch them.” There is *Eros* at play here. We are born in desire and reborn in desire. This is the inside story of the Christian life. At the end of the day, a prayer request is going forward, but not like we think. It is God praying, echoing back to Jesus praying to his father that they may be one as he is one with his Father and that the desire that is his may be in us.

I don't think the church, especially the church in America, has yet grasped the importance of desire for God. We still function as though desire is something God wants to destroy or at least imprison. We have not yet come to realize that desire is the currency that flows through the new that God has done and is doing in this world.

I am convinced that the future of the church will be found only in the places and spaces where people have learned to *desire one another*, and out of that desire to care for one another, and stand together against the forces of death. Yes, multi-racial, yes, multi-cultural, yes people of every orientation, but fundamentally people who have found their way *to love through desire*. They are together not because they have to be together, not because they are bound by some ethic or principle, but because they want to be together.

*Yet the desire we need is the desire we must ask for, the transformation we need, is the transformation we must ask for. We must pray that God would lower the sheet again, and show us who we do not desire and filled us afresh with the Holy Spirit to desire who God desires. Who does God desire? And who does God want you and I to desire? These are the questions we must ask ourselves and not resist the answers. It is time for us to be asked the same question that was asked of Peter. Why did **you** go to **them**?*

Amen