

**The Acts of an Easter People:  
Willing Response  
Acts 10:44-48**

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It is a common question that we get. All the time when people find out that we are from away, that maybe we didn't grow up in the Valley, when they find out we moved here from down South—further south than Boston, they ask.

Our friends from down south, when they see pictures of us standing in snow, or traveling around our area, they ask the same question, just the other way around.

“What is the biggest difference between the US and Canada?”

More often than not it leads to a discussion about healthcare. After all this time I still am amazed that I go to the doctor and when it is time to leave, I leave. I don't have to wait for the bill. I just say goodbye and go away.

That is different!

Buying gas is different! Liters are not like gallons! And I can assure you that gas is more expensive here than it is in SC. And to think that Joe Biden has made our gas prices go up too!

The fact is that there are many differences, and we have adjusted. But there is one that continues to cause issues.

The Postal Code. Or, if you are watching in the US the Zip Code.

There are times when we need to communicate with companies back in the US. My retirement account from our years working there; some credit cards, other financial entities; my online subscription to the Washington Post. All of these mean that at some point we have to fill out a record, to tell them where to send the bill.

It starts easy enough.

Name: Don Flowers Jr.

Street Address: 80 Chestnut Ave.

City: Wolfville

And then it starts to get tricky.

State: NS. It tries to autocorrect to North Carolina or North Dakota.

But the really really tricky part comes when it asks for the Postal Code. I type in B4P1W1, but it won't accept that last 1. It just stops. It says, only 5 numbers allowed. But B and P and W aren't numbers!

Who knew?

Who knew?

We live in a world where the forms that we HAVE to fill out have limitations. There are only a few ways that you can fit.

That was the view of the early church. Everyone knew, everyone knew that in order to be a Christ follower you first had to be Jewish. After all, Jesus was Jewish. He had followed the law, said he had not come to overturn the law but to fulfill it. All his disciples were Jewish. It was as clear as it could be.

To be Christian you had to be Jewish.

Sorry men, that meant that you had to be circumcised.

It also meant you had to be clean, to follow the kosher laws. Leviticus 11 is very clear about the foods you could eat and could not eat (another one of those chapters that you probably haven't spent a lot of time reading before going to the Superstore!)

They had a good and bad list. On the OK to eat list are:

Cows, deer, elk, moose, reindeer, sheep, giraffes; bass, bluefish, herring, halibut, pike, salmon, tarpon, trout, tuna; chicken dove, duck, partridge, pheasant, turkey; crickets and grasshopper are also acceptable.

On the Do Not Eat list are:

Pig—including pepperoni, ham, bacon (so much for my pizza;) No dog or wolf, no horse or mule (but who would??) No badger, bat, bear, camel or elephant. No hippopotamus or kangaroo or monkey or rhinoceros. And don't think about eating any worms. (So much for that old song!)

And no shark, swordfish, calamari, dolphin, whale or walrus.

And (here it gets personal) no crab, shrimp, lobster, oysters or scallops.

These were the rules and every Jewish person knew them. They had been drilled into their minds by their mothers who kept careful watch over the kitchen and the menus. Anyone who ate any of those items were, like the food, unclean and to be avoided.

So you can imagine how Peter felt when he woke up from an afternoon dream in which he had seen this picnic blanket filled with all the unclean foods coming down from heaven and a voice saying, "Take and Eat!"

Have you ever had one of those dreams in which you find yourself being tempted by that thing that you know you would never ever ever do while awake? THAT was Peter's dream!

And he responded the way any good person would. "Never! Not going to do it!" Even in his dream he knew that this was an evil temptation and he heard his mother's voice in his head. ***"Peter! No! You know better than that!"***

And yet, there was the voice, THE voice saying to him, *"Don't call profane anything God has made."*

And if that wasn't strange enough for one day, when he woke up there was a group looking for him, including a Roman soldier. Remember, this is a man who has already been

arrested several times for disturbing the peace! A man who had watched his teacher be arrested, tried and crucified by a mob. This couldn't be good!

But instead of a warrant for his arrest they came bearing an invitation to the house of a Centurion. So the next day Peter went with them. As if he had a choice! This was one of those invitations you can't refuse!

Peter had to have been filled with all kinds of expectations as they made the 50 KM trip from Joppa to Caesarea, the home base of the Roman legion. All kinds of expectations, and none of them good!

It is a pretty good assumption that none of his thoughts prepared him for what he experienced when he arrived. This centurion, the most important soldier in the Roman Army, a commander of at least 100 roman soldiers, threw himself on the ground in front of Peter! This is an act of worship!

Surely Peter was flattered! I mean, who doesn't want to be worshipped, adored, seen as a god? We might not want to admit it, but all of us want to be admired for something—our career, our children, our garden, a sermon.

Admired yes, but worshipped?

That was too far for Peter who pulled this officer to his feet and said, "I am only a man! I put my robe on just like you do!" We are the same!

But both of them knew that wasn't the fact!

This centurion was a commander in Caesar's army. Only Italian Roman citizens were eligible to be a centurion. He had to be a model soldier with the task of training, drilling and especially instilling the roman spirit into the troops.<sup>1</sup> That meant at all times reminding the army that Caesar was the son of god.

Yet here he was, bowing to a Jewish fisherman who proclaimed that an itinerant Galilean prophet who had been crucified on a Roman cross was the Son of God.

Something had to give!

In both of them.

Peter reminded him that it was unlawful for him to associate with a Gentile. And they both knew that for a Roman officer to bow to a Jew...

This did not fit in the boxes of their lives!

It was a conversion for both of them, for as Peter said, "*I understand that God shows no partiality.*"<sup>2</sup>

God shows no partiality.

We give that mental assent, don't we. If someone said that we will nod our heads agreeing.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert B Sloan. "Centurion" *Mercer Dictionary of the Bible*. (Mercer University Press:Macon, GA. 1990) 140.

<sup>2</sup> Acts 10:34. NRSV

But in our hearts?

I grew up at First Baptist Church, Cherryville, NC. It was the largest church in our town, and so obviously we were right; obviously God loved us the most! We were humble about, we would never say that out loud, but we knew.

We knew that next to us God loved the Methodists, because, well, they were a lot like us and we sometimes had retreats with each other.

The Presbyterians, well, they were all right I guess.

But the Lutherans??? Even though my cousins went to the Lutheran church they were always suspect, because, well, they were almost Catholic! And we all knew that Catholics weren't even Christian because...well because there weren't any Catholics in our town!

So imagine my shock when in the 7th grade I discovered that my best friend was....Catholic.

It was the first time that my little boxes began to crack open.

We have our boxes as individuals. We have them as churches, too, don't we. We have our ways of doing things, our procedures, our policies. And they are good and right and help us understand our distinctive, our uniqueness, our history.

But when they become so rigid that we cannot bend to the movement of God's spirit...

The centurion was converted that day. Peter was too. Perhaps that is the story of Acts. As we have seen through these past weeks the Easter story did not end on Easter. That was only the beginning. Conversion does not end when we profess "Jesus is Lord." That is only the beginning.

The Spirit of God is always calling us to conversion, to break out of our little boxes that we try to place God in. Over and over again we need to be reminded of the truth that JB Phillips wrote years ago in his book, *Your God is Too Small*.

I pray that our hearts might break out of our little boxes to see that indeed, God shows no partiality. In God's love there is no centurion or fisherman, no Jew or Roman, no slave or free, no male or female, no whatever label we want to use to divide us.

The good news of the gospel is what we heard in that little song we learned as a child. "Jesus loves me". Whoever your "me" might be.

Thanks be to God.