



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God, our Father, and the Lord, our Savior, the Risen Christ. Amen.

So that story in the book of Acts, it is actually one of the most important stories in the whole Bible, and likely you've never heard of it. And that's because it's so normative now in the church, we expect to see Gentiles. Y'all are Gentiles. We expect to see us in church and we can't imagine a time when people like us were excluded from fellowships with Christians because we weren't Jewish. So the first Christians on the day of Pentecost were Jews, all of them. Jews from all over the world, they heard the good news in their own language. And Jews had spent centuries reminding themselves and being reminded by the Romans that they weren't the same, not the same background nor share the same values. There were real physical differences, like circumcision, but there were also cultural and religious practices, like what they ate, restrictions that are on Jews today with their dietary requirements.

So Peter - Peter, who was preaching on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit fell on them and 5,000 people were baptized in a single day. Peter was going around telling all the Jews from Judea about Jesus and was baptizing all the Jews. Now, Peter, man, he's a rockstar in the Christian Hall of fame. I mean, he's got it going on. I know we always think of Peter who betrayed Jesus and everything, but like in the book of Acts, he does amazing things. He sees a man who's paralyzed and he helps them walk. He gets thrown into prison and God sends an earthquake and the prison doors go wide open. The prison guard is worried that he's going to get fired so he's about to kill himself, and Peter saves his life physically and then religiously because he baptizes him and teaches him about Jesus.

And then there was a time when Peter shows up and his friend Tabitha has died. And Peter goes into the room and says to Tabitha, "Tabitha, get up," and she gets up. She's alive again. I mean, what a rock star! Thankfully Peter, wasn't afraid to share the many, many, many ways that in the scripture, he was constantly getting corrected. He would say things and he had this really cool relationship with God where he would say stuff and he wasn't afraid to step into it and put his foot in his mouth, and God helpfully course corrected him and showed him a different way.

So for instance, there's a time when Peter is up on the mountain with James and John and their buddy Jesus, and all of a sudden Jesus has changed. There's this

light that's coming from Him. He's transfigured, he's dazzling. And then comes Moses and Elijah, two rockstars from Judaism, and they've been dead for centuries, and they're all standing and talking. And what I would do if I saw this is I'd just sit my butt down and listen to all of them, right? But Peter, no, he's like, oh, let's make some tents and let's put each one of you in - I mean, to this day, people are like, what was he thinking? But then God helpfully course corrects him. And there's a voice that comes from the sky and says, don't make anything. This is My Son, listen to Him.

Or that time when Jesus tells all the disciples that He's going to wash their feet and teach them a new commandment: love one another as I am loving you. And Peter says, no, you're not touching my feet and Jesus has to help him along and say, you know what, actually, I do need to wash your feet, otherwise you're not going to understand what this kingdom thing is all about. So then Peter of course overreacts. And he says, oh my gosh, not my feet, my hands also, my head, my whole body. And Jesus says, no, just the feet is fine. That's all we need to do in order to show you what is happening in this new way of being.

So when Peter is in Joppa, which is this gorgeous seaside town, it's this beautiful city, none of us should be surprised that Peter is once again course-corrected by God. But this change, it's major. This changes everything. So he's visiting his buddy Simon the tanner, and this guy has this really swanky beach house and it's got a veranda. And so Peter's out there sunning himself, listening to the sea. And you know, sometimes that sea air can make you kind of hungry and he realized he's kind of famished. And all of a sudden, he sees this vision of this sheet that comes down and on it are all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds. And it's like a picnic from the sky.

Now, I would consider it scrumptious, but Peter saw everything on it and knew that his dietary following of his faith didn't allow him to eat anything on the picnic blanket. Scripture actually said to him, don't eat anything that's on that blanket. But this picnic blanket comes with an invitation, says to Peter, get up, go kill, and eat. And Peter says, no, no, I'm not going to do that. I know I'm not supposed to eat anything forbidden. And then comes what should be one of the most important verses for all Christians that is in the Bible. A voice says, what God has made clean let no one call unclean.

And even though this is a metaphor, Peter understands what God is saying. The former ways that we all know are no longer God's ways. The Gentiles, they used to be out, now they're in. And here's what I learned from this. God keeps cleaning. God keeps course correcting and like Peter, we're going to get it wrong. We're going to continue to say, wait, wait, wait. I thought this wasn't supposed to happen. I thought we weren't supposed to do this. And like Peter,

we're going to believe we're right. But God likes to remind us over and over again, that when that picnic blanket comes down in front of us, don't be surprised about what's on it or who's on it. There are so many things that we need to change about ourselves so that we can do what God is doing when God invites people to the picnic.

Allow me to illustrate. I have for you a picnic blanket. This is an actual picnic blanket. This is a blanket that I grew up on using when we went to picnics. I don't know why it's so big. I think my parents wanted us to be far away from other picnickers. So here's my picnic blanket, and God has invited me to the picnic. This is a late picnic. I think I need someone to join me. I need someone who I like, who's like me, who gets me, who I feel an affinity to. I know, Kellie Herdade, can you come forward?

Now, you all may not know this but Kellie and I are Lutherans. We are Lutherans among you Episcopalians. That's why we belong on the blanket because God invited the Lutherans to the picnic. God invited the Lutherans to the picnic and it's fine with me. I don't need anyone else at my picnic.

Kellie: Manisha.

Pastor Manisha: Yes?

Kellie: God invited everyone. Could we just get a few more?

Pastor Manisha: Okay. All right. Let me think. Let me think. You know what? Something really interesting happened. God was helping course-correcting the church and God began to invite women to the picnic.

Kellie: Women. All women.

Pastor Manisha: Can we have some women come forward and join us?

Kellie: Come on up here.

Pastor Manisha: Who has the spirit filling them that they can come forward to the picnic? All right. We got some women. Now we've got a picnic. Women know how to have fun. Women have a great time. Okay. There we go. The picnic's good. Yeah? Are we good, Kellie? Excellent. Excellent.

Kellie: Look at these beautiful little girls. Come on up.

Pastor Manisha: Here ends the picnic. We're good. Yeah, we're good?

Kellie: No.

Pastor Manisha: No?

Kellie: Manisha.

Pastor Manisha: Yes?

Kellie: God said everyone.

Pastor Manisha: Oh my gosh, Kellie.

Kellie: We have some more room on the blanket.

Pastor Manisha: Okay. Okay. There's this really cool thing that happened in the church that I'm so freaking proud of about the church. For so long, they used to say that people who are gay and lesbian and bisexual and transgender and queer and anything else, were not invited on the blanket. Bring them up. You have been invited. God has invited you to the blanket. Come!

Kellie: You are in that community. You are ours. Come on! We want you on the blanket. Yes.

Pastor Manisha: Yay! Yay! This is so exciting. Kellie, our blanket is getting small. We're just going to extend this blanket, pretend like it's all the way back there. Okay. That's enough. This is big enough, no?

Kellie: I think there are some more people.

Pastor Manisha: So here's the problem. Sometimes with some churches they don't like children.

Kellie: No, they don't.

Pastor Manisha: Yeah. Okay. All right.

Kellie: I'm so glad I'm here.

Pastor Manisha: This church loves children. We'd like to invite children to the picnic. Anyone children or child.

Kellie: Jesus said all the little children should come to me. Every single one of you, come on up. Even big kids. Big kids. Front row, come on. Let's see. Can we fit them on the blanket? Come on.

Pastor Manisha: Children and youth. We love our youth. My gosh.

Kellie: Teenagers are the best of the best, aren't they?

Pastor Manisha: I know, they're amazing. They're all taller than me. What do you think? Okay. I got one. I got a group who's not invited to the picnic. Ready? White heterosexual males. Y'all have too much power. No, no, no. Not invited to my picnic. Too much power.

Kellie: Manisha, God said all people are invited to the picnic.

Pastor Manisha: All of them?

Kellie: Yes.

Pastor Manisha: Okay.

Kellie: Come on.

Pastor Manisha: White heterosexual males, come to the picnic!

Kellie: You power forces, come on up! The picnic's getting heavy.

Pastor Manisha: I know, I know. I think I'm getting the hang of this. I think I'm getting the hang of this. I think what you're trying to tell me is no matter what I think when that picnic blanket comes down, everybody in the whole world has been invited to God's picnic. Yeah?

Kellie: Yeah.

Pastor Manisha: And that's hard for us to know and understand because sometimes we meet people who are sinners.

Kellie: Absolutely, sinners are invited.

Pastor Manisha: And sinners are really, really difficult. In fact, I see a room full of sinners.

Kellie: I think our blanket needs to be rolled up.

Pastor Manisha: I think our blanket is coming out there. If you have been invited to God's picnic and you'd like to accept, please stand.

Kellie: Stand up picnic goers. Amen.

Pastor Manisha: Amen. May we always, always remember that God has invited everyone to the picnic. Sometimes it takes us some time to understand that. And it's okay. We're in good company. Peter had some trouble, but we will always, always remember what God has made clean let no one call unclean.

Kellie: Amen. Amen, sister.

Pastor Manisha: Amen.