In the passage that we just read from the book of *Acts*, the Apostle Peter was confronted by a group of fellow Jews who were criticizing him for doing something that he wasn’t supposed to. Peter apparently had crossed the line by stepping out of his social, cultural, and religious norms by interacting with the Gentiles. That was a big No-No!!! Sure enough Peter’s got a lot of explaining to do with his fellow Jewish believers his interactions with the Gentiles.

 Peter shared with them a vision that he had seen and a voice that he heard from above, commissioning him to go preach the words to the Gentiles and to baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. In his vision, Peter saw this huge white sheet coming down from heaven and along with it various kinds of four-legged animals, including reptiles and birds – many of which were considered spiritually uncleaned and forbidden to come near, never mind killing them and eating them as food.

 ***“How can this be?”*** Peter asked ***“You know, Lord, that we can’t kill and eat these unclean animals. Nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth.”***On one hand, Peter was confused, asking God why? On the other hand, he was defending his piety and self-proclaimed righteousness. Keep in mind that his was the very same Peter who had denied Jesus when asked upon his affiliation with Jesus. But this was a different Peter now. This was the new Peter who is now commissioned to do new things for Christ. His new charge was to go tend the sheep and feed the lamb and to proclaim God’s new hope and promises.

 So the voice from Heaven responded to Peter saying, ***“What God has made clean, you must not call profane.****”[[1]](#footnote-1)* All of a sudden, Peter found himself in a conundrum wrestling between the tradition of what the law says and what the Spirit was telling him to do now. Don’t we find ourselves in a similar dilemma from time to time?

 Then later on, three men came up to Peter asking him to baptize them and their entire household, right there on the spot. Obviously Peter wasn’t expecting such reactions. For they were the Gentiles and not Jews. The message of salvation was not supposed to be meant for them. **We’ve never done this before!!!** Since when, are the Gentiles being considered a part of the chosen people of God?

However, the invitation was still open and available for ANYONE who chooses to “respond” accordingly in their faith. This was a pivotal point in the course of human history. By the grace of God and what Christ has done upon the cross, the kingdom of heaven has now been expanded and made available not just for the Jews but now for ALL of God’s people. God was up to something new once again.

As I mentioned earlier, we are in the midst of the season of Easter and Pentecost. This part of the liturgical season brings us a sense of renewal. It is a season of retelling and re-living the stories and witnesses of Christ’s resurrection, as they play out in our lives today. However, this is also where the “rubber meets the road”. When the euphoria of Easter and soon to be Pentecost winds down and transitions into the Ordinary common time, how do we sustain our passion and witness. When Jesus asks us “Do you still love me?” How do we respond?

**This is our mission as Christ mandated us to feed our sheep and to tend our lamb, and to bring the body of Christ and the living water to where the people hunger and thirst the most.** Let us must never forget that.

 Christ’s story of resurrection did not end when he came out of the tomb or even ascended into the Heaven to be with the Father, 40 days after his resurrection. **Christ’s story of salvation, resurrection, and hope is being re-told continuously by the disciples, as part of their living faith while dwelling in the midst of a world that yearns for new hope and promise each day.**

 No doubt this was a trying time for those early disciples, not knowing what the future may hold, as they ventured out into this uncharted territory of co-existence with those who may be “different” from them. **A new “normal” is being established for the resurrected body of Christ, as God is about make all things new!** But are the people ready? Are they ready to embrace this new reality of what the Spirit has set before them? These were the questions for the early church then, as they are for us today as well.

 **Our eternal God is in the business of re-building and renewing our hope and our faith, in spite of our differences.** We may not share the same perspectives or coming out of the same experiences of our past, but we are being called to share what we have in common and to live with one another of the same mind, in the same Spirit, and responding to the same calling we have in Christ.

 This post-Easter/Pentecostal season opens up a whole new way for us of re-imagining how we may see things and how we may relate to one another, not of our own human perspective or doing, but of God’s perspective and God’s doing. As the Holy Spirit continues to reshape us into the people whom God wanted us to be, the Spirit also wrestles with our hearts that may be once hardened and challenges us to see God’s vision while ***“Making All Things New.”***

In light of the many sad realities that occurred both in this country and around the world where there have been a great sentiment of xenophobia and fears against all foreigners, we find ourselves once again instead of building “bridges” and relations across our humanity based upon our faiths, races, nationalities or ethnicities. We draw lines on the sand and put up these visible (and invisible) walls that divide and separate us among the people of God. We separate families instead of uniting them. We close our doors and turn people away, as they search for new opportunities and for a better future. But as our gospel reminds us today that God’s kingdom is ever so expanding and embracing WHOSOEVER profess his or her faith in the risen Lord. This is the fundamental basis of what Christ commanded us to do, as we profess to “love God” and to “love our neighbors as ourselves”?

 As citizens of this country and of God’s kingdom, we found ourselves like the early disciples caught in this ethical, religious and social dilemma. What should our proper responses be, if we were called to exercise God’s universal love towards others and to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us?[[2]](#footnote-2) Are we doing our parts to feed our lambs and to tend our sheep, as Christ commanded us?

 **God’s LOVE breaks down all barriers and withstands all walls.** What God did on the cross through Christ was a universal act of love. It bore no distinctions between “them and us” because Christ died for ALL.[[3]](#footnote-3) *“For God so loved the WORLD, that He gave His only begotten Son…”* not just for the Jews, or for the Gentiles but for the people of the WORLD. The Gospel is for everyone to embrace.

 Recently, I attended a seminar on the theme of “Contextualization of the Gospel” in a pluralistic world. The speaker challenged the entire audience, what does it mean to effectively communicate the message of the Gospel in today’s challenging context?

 The speaker talked about how that **Gospel Contextualization is an effort to bring personal relevancy and meanings to the Gospel message, to different people of different values, cultural upbringing, and traditions without compromising the authority of the essential values of the Scripture.** Gospel Contextualization is **NOT**, however, an effort to “water-down” the core values of the Gospel into framing whatever we humanly see fits, based on our own interpretations and not of the Holy Spirit’s. But instead, it invites us to put on different spiritual lens, different theological spectacles, so that we may see things from a broader scheme of how God speaks to us today, instead of being so narrowly focused and patterned by our own pre-supposed thoughts and notions.

Come to think of it, each and every one of us are also “contextual” theologians, as we wrestle to draw personal understanding and interpretation of the scriptures every time we open up scripture. The gospel is contextual in a sense that **each of us bring our unique stories of how God has spoken to us and how God has called us to be a part of this journey of faith together!!!**

How we read and understand scripture today will be different from what it was yesterday or the year before, because our lives and our experiences have changed. Although our context may be shifted but God remains the same both yesterday, today, and tomorrow. The Spirit of Pentecost, which we will be celebrating in a couple of weeks, invites us to think “outside the box” theologically…to see what God is up to, not by how we define God or what our Godly experience to be, but what God reveals to us and challenges us with our thoughts and how we may respond contextually with our actions and in our lives tomorrow. This is what discipleship means for us in this particular time and in this particular corner of God’s world today.

 By the virtue of our baptism, ALL of us are commissioned to be agents or ambassadors of God’s on-going activities in this world. We have received the power of the Holy Spirit to carry out acts of miracles and transformation, not only in our own lives but more importantly in the lives of others around us, wherever we might be sent.

As one theologian - Joseph S. Harvard commented, *“If there is hope for the church in these days when there is so much dissension and division in faith communities, then we must pray to have visions that bring us together to receive the gift of discernment. We need to be open to the work of God’s healing and reconciling spirit.*

 *Do we have anything to offer that differs from other groups characterized by dissension and division? Can we listen to each other and seek to discover where God’s Spirit is leading? Can we broaden the Heavenly banquet table so everyone has a place to dine?” [[4]](#footnote-4)*

 There is always room for a few more around the Heavenly banquet table, even if that might mean that we might be a little bit more crowded or perhaps a few less bits to eat. But God’s grace is sufficient for us to share with all those who want to receive it, they will be fed.

 Friends, God is **“Making All Things New”** through the work of the Holy Spirit. This is a blessing, as well as a challenge, to the church and to each of us today. Through His grace, God has opened up new mission frontiers to those who seek after Him in faith. **Salvation is no longer achieved by the circumcision of the flesh, but by the circumcision of the heart.** As Moses challenged his people - the Israelites, while journeying through the wilderness in those 40 years, reminding them of their ultimate calling rests in God and not in themselves, that ***the LORD our God will circumcise our heart and the heart of our descendants, so that we will love the LORD our God with all our heart and with all our soul, in order that we may live.[[5]](#footnote-5)***

 Through our baptism of the water and of the Spirit, God has made us all new creations bearing the new image of the body and what is to come. Thanks be to God. In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *Acts 11:9* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Matthew 5:44* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Acts 11:12* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Harvard Joseph S., Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 2, P.454*  [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Deuteronomy 30:6* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)