A C T S: All Are Welcome!

July 2, 2006

ACTS: All Are Welcome

In this ancient story, a "pagan" Roman Centurion named Cornelius sends for St. Peter. He doesn't know this will eventually lead to his conversion as a Christ follower. Right this moment God may be preparing someone who will send for you, asking about Faith, Hope, and Love as a Christian. What do you say or do when that time comes?

Acts 10:1-8

In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort, as it was called. He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God. One afternoon at about three o'clock he had a vision in which he clearly saw an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius." He stared at him in terror and said, "What is it, Lord?" He answered, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. Now send men to Joppa for a certain Simon who is called Peter; he is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside." When the angel who spoke to him had left, he called two of his slaves and a devout soldier from the ranks of those who served him, and after telling them everything, he sent them to Joppa.

For Personal Study

I'm driving into the tree shaded tranquility of my neighborhood. I am welcomed by the familiar sights and sounds. My mind is making the switch from work life to home life. I seek the sanctuary of the familiar and the most beloved…

Then I notice someone. They're just walking down the street. But I noticed them. Why? I am shamed by the question that has triggered very deep in my psyche: "Why is THAT person here?" Somewhere in the deep recesses of my upbringing and life experiences I register that person as a stranger because they are different than me: different race, culture or lifestyle. I register a little internal alarm of threat. Once this little moment passes, I recognize that this person probably lives in my development. But oh, how I wish my initial response was not so!

Here in Columbia we are blessed with an opportunity to impact the world by going right next door. There are people of all colors and nations who are literally our neighbors. How will we respond? How will we examine our hearts and minds, revealing the truth about ourselves and the work of Christ in us?

In Acts 10, God brought Peter and Cornelius together to carry out a plan for each of them. Cornelius needed the hope of the Gospel. Peter, as the leader of the first century church, could meet Cornelius' need, yet the challenge for Peter was much larger. Peter was confronted with the deeper question of "who does God love?"

As he offered hope through Christ to Cornelius, he showed us how to build a bridge to all the people of the earth. The love of the Father and the salvation through Jesus reached across color, culture and lifestyle is for every human being.

I long to drive into my neighborhood and notice the "different" people with an instantaneous heart of joy. Until that time, the Lord uses these moments to reshape my heart. Like Peter, I am called to rethink what it means to "love my neighbor as myself."

Readings & Questions

Turn to page 2 for more inspiration and learning, on your own or in a group!

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Readings & Questions for Daily Discovery or Group Discussion

Monday, July 3
John 13:34-35
Growing up, who did you associate with and not associate with? How does this impact your life today?

Tuesday, July 4
Matthew 18:10-14
In your daily activities, look for the people you are inclined to dismiss or avoid. Who and where are they?

Wednesday, July 5
Leviticus 19:18, Mark 12:31, Galatians 5:14
What would you do for yourself that you could also offer to a "neighbor?" How would that demonstrate God's love for them?

Thursday, July 6
Romans 8:5, Galatians 5:22-23
How would the Holy Spirit have you respond to people who are different than you?

Friday, July 7
John 10:1-5
How might Jesus use the relationships that we build with others as a gateway to draw them to him? What relationship will you now seek to build for Jesus' sake?

God's Church in Action

The ELCA World Hunger Appeal serves neighbors "around the corner" through domestic hunger grants. Visit www.elca.org/grantinghope *to learn more.*

Ruby and her three teenage boys were living in a Chicago shelter. After six months, Ruby and her sons had exhausted their allotted time in the shelter and were faced with homelessness. Ruby followed up on a referral from the shelter and took her family to Bethel New Life, Inc. Bethel literally opened the doors for Ruby and her three sons. Supported in part by a domestic hunger grant from ELCA World Hunger, Bethel is a non-profit organization that provides affordable temporary and long-term housing to people who have little or no income, are homeless, or cannot hold steady employment.

"God is very much at the center of this organization," said Steven McCullough, president and CEO of Bethel. Bethel also offers case management, parenting instruction, counseling programs for teens, job-finding assistance, and other services. ***"[Bethel] is keeping me off the streets and allowing me to focus on my needs, not my wants,"*** Ruby said. Ruby lives in one of Bethel's apartment complexes. As soon as she finds a steady job, Ruby and her sons will move into their own home. ***"I'm accepting any opportunity that's positive for me, to better my life, to be a parent to my kids,"*** Ruby said. ***"This time...there's nothing holding me back."***

Last Christmas, the people of St. John provided gifts and food to make a true celebration for 15 local families in great need. Throughout the year, food items collected for the FISH pantry meet emergency food in Howard County.