

As I read the passage in Acts I began thinking of how the world has changed in regards to food. Growing up in Northern Maine there were foods that we had never heard of: tacos, hush puppies, okra or marionberries—let alone Chinese, Korean or other “strange” cuisines. Of course, I wonder how many of you have feasted on a mess of “fiddleheads.” Today we literally have most of the foods of the world at our finger tips. Within a short drive of here today we could probably locate most of the cuisines of the world. I remember a restaurant on the way to FBC/LA that featured Chinese/Mexican cuisine (never did visit it!).

Peter is under criticism. For what? For meeting with and eating with Gentiles. Centuries of traditions are being overturned and those in the Jerusalem Church are not sure what to do. There were laws concerning what could and could not be eaten. These were Laws the Gentiles did not follow – they ate foods considered unclean in Israel.

Our ABC missionary Walter White tells about moving to Bangladesh and how they hired a Muslim cook and had him buy all new cookware for their home there. When asked why, Walt said it was because the Muslim cook could guarantee those who may be guests in their home that no pork or pork product has ever been cooked or served in their dishes. Muslims not only cannot eat pork, but cannot use any container that has come in contact with pork. Peter has grown up with similar restrictions – he had kept the food laws. Now he is being asked to change his mindset not only towards the Gentiles but towards the foods they eat.

Who is challenging Peter? Who is criticizing him? It’s not the Jewish religious leaders, the Scribes and Pharisees, but members of the Church – it is the leadership of the Jerusalem Church who are questioning what Peter has done. Peter is reporting/answering to the leadership about his trip to a Gentile community. Now we need to remember the church is in its infancy. They are still in the development stages. They are trying to determine who is welcome and what one must do to become a member of the church. They are sorting through what it means to be a follower of Christ and what Laws still pertain to them and what Laws are no longer appropriate. What Laws must we still obey? What Laws can we ditch? They still go to the Temple daily to worship and share the “good news.”

Now the word is coming to the Gentile community. Gentiles are coming to faith, they are believing in Jesus. If they come to faith what are the requirements for them? What Laws do they have to follow? Do you remember James A. Michener’s, Hawaii? (book or movie). It is about American missionaries coming to Hawaii and introducing Christianity to the Islands. The missionaries try to make the Hawaiians conform to American dress codes. I know I have told this before but whenever I think of this I remember a graduation at the School of Theology at Central Philippine University on a hot, muggy evening. Sitting in the front row are six of us American missionaries wearing wonderful, cool Philippine barongs (dress shirt/blouse). Sitting next to us is a graduate celebrating his 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of graduating from the College of Theology. He is wearing the suit he graduated in: black wool, long sleeved white shirt and wool tie. He reminded us, “This is what the missionaries made us wear.” We apologized to him.

It is not what we wear or what we eat that makes us Christian; it is the condition of our heart.

Peter reports that the Spirit gave him the following direction:

NRSV – “The Spirit told me to go with them and not make any distinction between us.”

NIV – “The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them.”

MESSAGE – “The Spirit told me to go with them, no questions asked.”

CEV – “The Holy Spirit told me to go with them and not to worry.”

The times they are a-changing. God’s Spirit is moving them beyond what they had expected. God is challenging their thoughts and understanding of what it means to be a child of God. Gentiles are now coming to faith – Gentiles are now invited to the table and are hearing the same invitation they heard, “Take and eat.” And, this is what is hard – they are welcome to bring their own food to the Table. Imagine their pot luck meals. Can you hear, “Here, come and try this pork sandwich?” “Try it you will like it!” There at the table are foods they have not been allowed to eat – people they have never associated with are now sitting beside them.

Peter reports, “*When they heard this they were silenced. And then they praised God saying...*” “Take and eat” means more than just taking the bread and the cup. Their Communion meals were fellowship suppers – times of sharing from the bounty of their lives. “Take and eat” also now means welcoming Gentiles to the Table and their food. John’s vision of heaven is being played out on earth – in Jerusalem and around the world. “Take and eat” – remembering that Christ died for the whole world. God has given and we have received – and the invitation is open to all. We should be in praise of God for what God has done – the Table now includes us.

Take and eat in remembrance of Christ and the growing, expanding family of God.

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Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quoted is from NRSV, NCCC/USA 1989  
NIV, New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1989  
CEV, American Bible Society, 1995  
Peterson, Eugene, The Message, Zondervan, 2004, 2006