

Good morning, my siblings in Christ. It's a beautiful morning that our Lord has made for us. I would like to give thanks to our Lord for bringing us back together so that we may be able to learn more about Him. Also, thank you to those joining us online wherever you may be. Thank you. And lastly, I would like to say to Pastor Sunny that I appreciate her for offering me an opportunity to share the message God has placed in my heart and also equipping me to share the message more efficiently. Thank you.

Today's story is from the Book of Acts, chapter 10, telling us about the story of God dealing with two issues at once—Cornelius' need to hear God's message and Peter's cultural bias he needed to overcome to take God's message of love beyond his own culture. If I may use an idiom, God is killing two birds with one stone in this story.

In the narrative of today's story, we have Cornelius, a Roman soldier, and Peter, who was called "Simon" at his birth and when he was a fisherman. He was a Jew. In today's story, it is obvious that religious bias is difficult to overcome and that the release of long-held traditions is gradual. A good question for all serious disciples we can ask based on today's story is, "What am I hold on to which comes from my culture and traditions which have no scriptural basis?"

If we continue to read today's story, in verses 9-16, we see Peter's astounding vision and encounter with the Lord. As exciting as it was for him to have such a vision, Peter was unwilling to leave his religious taboos until the vision had been repeated three times. Religious traditions die slowly!

We are wedded to our culture and our traditions. We let go of them slowly because they are part of our lives. The process of God changing Peter is seen in the narrative. As Peter began to be released from them, he *invited non-Jewish seekers into the Jewish home where he was staying. In Caesarea, Peter went a step farther, entered a non-Jewish home, and carried on an intimate conversation with these non-Jews. When the Holy Spirit fell on them, Peter began to understand the inclusiveness of the Savior and accepted them as equals. He baptized them as equal members of the Body of Christ. When returning to Jerusalem, he defended them as equals in the church of Christ.* All of this brought great freedom to Peter

so that when the pivotal council of the first century was held in Jerusalem, Peter was the voice that convinced the leaders to accept as equals the gentiles who became disciples of Jesus through Paul's work (Acts 15).

So, our God doesn't look at us with our differences. He treats us equally. We may have learned our Lord in our cultural ways, but all of us are His same beloved children for Him. When it comes to Lord's works, He doesn't have any favorite child. Umm... even though I believe that I am His favorite child. Just kidding 😊. The fact is we all are God's favorite. Like Peter, we can go beyond our culture and tell people how our Lord has spoken to us.

Today is White Sunday. Some of you might not know what White Sunday is. In Samoan Culture, it is a designated Sunday to acknowledge and celebrate childhood. White Sunday is the National Children's Day in Samoa. When the London Missionaries Society (LMS) came to Samoa, the missionaries set up this special holiday to recognize the children in our midst and honor them. Since its establishment, wherever we Samoans are, we keep this day holy by having our children share God's love through singing, dancing, and reciting the Bible verses. We usually wear a white color outfit for this day.

I remember waking up on White Sunday with the breakfast already prepared for my siblings and me by my parent. My mom ironed all our clothes, got everything ready, and prepared us for our special day. She made sure everything was ready for us. I love my mom, but I can tell you this. That was the only morning I could hear my mom's calm and peaceful voice, unlike the sound of an alarm clock waking me up. In Samoan culture, everyone in the house needs to wake up when the mom in the house gets up at 5am.

White Sunday morning is usually peaceful, with no rush. However, later on, we, the Samoan children, had to work because we were "threatened" by our parents to do so. What I mean is that they will always tell these things. If you don't speak louder and don't do your part in the White Sunday program, you will not get to eat until after the program. During the program, they stare at us with the scariest look to force us to behave and do our parts well. The parents want their children to be in the best shape and outlook with the Christian values on White Sunday.

Celebrating White Sunday in America is a little different than the celebration of White Sunday in Samoa as we adapt the culture in America in this Samoan

celebration. Like Peter, we, the Samoans living in America, adapt the culture of the context for the sake of sharing God's message of love.

On this Samoan White Sunday, I would like to say that I am grateful for my native Samoan culture. It is the culture that taught me to keep the Christian value as my priority, respect the elders, and pursue peace in living with others. I'm blessed and grateful to share this part of my culture with you all today. And also appreciate all of you, especially those who wear a white outfit on this day in respect of the Samoan culture. Thank you.

As we see in the story of God, God doesn't speak to one race but speaks to all human races. Often, we lose sight of God's inclusivity because we are so concerned about our differences. I believe celebrating God's love and mercy in whatever way is a good thing because it shows the diverse beauty of God's children in different cultures. I encourage people of different cultures to celebrate God in their cultural way. However, I would also like to encourage them, and us, not to lose sight that our God loves all people equally. In God's kingdom, there is no favoritism.

If God is speaking to you today to free you up from your cultural bias, just obey. Enjoy the freedom in Christ by letting go of your understanding and your uptightness. Hang loose, my siblings in Christ! God is at work. Let us follow the lead of the Holy Spirit. Happy White Sunday, everyone!