

## Witnesses Chosen By God

*By Linda Rex*

**March 31, 2024, Resurrection Day or Easter Sunday**—We have reached the end of Holy Week, and are facing with a mixture of amazement and joy the empty tomb of Jesus Christ. Peter and John, when they hear the news, run to see if what they are told is true, and only John sees the graveclothes and believes. Peter is a little more reticent (John 20:1–18).

We find Peter, a little later on, going fishing in the Sea of Galilee with some of the disciples. Soon he is facing another futile night of fishing, only to catch more fish than they can handle when this mysterious person on the shore suggests they throw their nets off the other side of the boat. Peter, when he realizes this is Jesus, jumps out of the boat to meet him on the beach.

Little did Peter realize that Jesus' affirmation of his call to ministry would involve such a transformational encounter as he had later on at Simon the Tanner's house. In our passage for today, Acts 10:34–43, we find ourselves in the midst of a story where Peter is preaching the gospel to a group of people in Cornelius' home. Cornelius is a centurion of the Italian cohort, and for Peter to be in his home meant that he was violating every Jewish restriction regarding table fellowship with Gentiles.

But Peter was recalling his vision he had at Simon's house, when the Lord had explicitly told him to go with the men Cornelius had sent. It was the first time that Peter began to understand that table fellowship with Gentiles did not require that they become Jews first. No, Peter saw that God did not show partiality to anyone. Indeed, people from every nation could have a relationship with God simply because of Jesus.

Peter saw that he and his fellow disciples had been chosen for the purpose of being witnesses to all Jesus had done while he was on earth. Jesus Christ was Lord of all, Peter proclaimed, and was anointed by God (i.e. was the Messiah) and empowered to heal people and deliver them from demonic oppression. When Peter recalled the many ways in which Jesus reached out to heal and deliver people, he surely must have remembered the healing of the Canaanite woman's daughter, the healing of the centurion's child, and the many other occasions where Jesus showed kindness to those who were non-Jews or Gentiles, as well as eating and drinking with those whom the religious leaders believed were the untouchables.

How excited Cornelius and his household must have been when Peter began to preach that day, to tell of the impartiality of God and his heart of compassion for those who were seeking his face! As Peter spoke, the Spirit of God came upon those who were listening, confirming what he knew in his heart was true—that a person did not need to become a Jew before being accepted and forgiven by God. No, indeed, it is all of grace. It is a gift from God through Jesus our Lord.

Our table fellowship is based in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and we participate by faith. Our baptism and our sharing in communion acknowledge what the Spirit does in uniting us with Christ, enabling us to sharing in Jesus' own face-to-face relationship with the Father in the Spirit.

The question for us today is whether there are any persons we exclude from the table of fellowship because they don't measure up to our personal standards of inclusion. Is Jesus Christ the sole and central meeting place in all our relationships? Are we recognizing and acknowledging, and sharing with others our heavenly Father's presence through Jesus by the Spirit in us and with us and through us? What are some ways we can participate with Jesus in his

More devotionals may be found at <https://lifeinthetrinity.blog>

Subscribe to Our Life in the Trinity YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/@ourlifeinthetrinity>

ongoing ministry of healing and deliverance as we go about our everyday lives? What are some ways we can include others we normally would not include in our table fellowship or spiritual community?

The empty tomb has implications for our spiritual life and our life in community. The empty tomb means that things aren't the way they used to be. The empty tomb means a paradigm shift in which we may need to change the way we see ourselves and see others, and the way we treat those around us. Are we open to what God might want us to do differently?

*Heavenly Father, forgive us for all the ways we create divisions between ourselves and others. Forgive us for how, so often, we place ourselves above others or try to push them down so we can rise. Forgive us, too, Lord, for all the ways we have hurt people by our prejudices, our criticisms, our condemnations, and our judgmental attitudes. We receive in humble gratitude, the grace that is ours in Jesus, and ask that we might ever offer it to others in love and service, empowered by your heavenly Spirit. Amen.*

*“Opening his mouth, Peter said: ‘I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him. The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)—you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.’” Acts 10:34–43 NASB*