


A Five-Day Devotional Journey
May 25 - June 1, 2008

Acts 10:1-16

New menu

1 To eat or not to eat, that is the question

Read. Leviticus 11:42-47 NLT

All such animals that scurry along the ground are detestable, and you must never eat them. Do not defile yourselves by touching them. You must not make yourselves ceremonially unclean because of them. For I am the LORD your God. You must consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy. So do not defile yourselves with any of these small animals that scurry along the ground. For I, the LORD, am the one who brought you up from the land of Egypt, that I might be your God. Therefore, you must be holy because I am holy. These are the instructions regarding land animals, birds, marine creatures, and animals that scurry along the ground. By these instructions you will know what is unclean and clean, and which animals may be eaten and which may not be eaten."

Read. Mark 7:14-19 NLT

Then Jesus called to the crowd to come and hear. "All of you listen," he said, "and try to understand. It's not what goes into your body that defiles you; you are defiled by what comes from your heart." Then Jesus went into a house to get away from the crowd, and his disciples asked him what he meant by the parable he had just used. "Don't you understand either?" he asked. "Can't you see that the food you put into your body cannot defile you? Food doesn't go into your heart, but only passes through the stomach and then goes into the sewer." (By saying this, he declared that every kind of food is acceptable in God's eyes.)

Think.

- Extra credit — if you have time read Leviticus 11 in its entirety. What do you make of the dietary regulations in Leviticus 11? What is the point? Were these laws a lesson in submitting to God's authority, a lesson in hygiene or holiness or what?
- How does Jesus' teaching impact these dietary laws? Do you think the disciples understood the full implication of what Jesus said? When it comes to diet, what is Jesus' primary concern? How has your diet been lately?

Pray.

Lord, as the Psalmist says, 'Open your mouth, and I will fill it.' I open my mouth wide now to receive from you. Go deep into my heart, and let your holiness and justice flow out into my life.

Live.

Keep tabs on your "heart diet" this week...ponder it at each meal.

Peter fairly exploded with his good news: "It's God's own truth, nothing could be plainer: God plays no favorites!

It makes no difference who you are or where you're from— if you want God and are ready to do as he says, the door is open.

Acts 10:34-35 Message

Kashrut.

It's more than just a menu. It's a way of life.

And that's what it had been for Kefa—Peter. The Jewish dietary laws and traditions, rooted in the *Torah*, laid out clearly in Leviticus, became a familiar backdrop for all of life, an unchanging source of identity for a people scattered across the Roman world — and an invisible wall between Jewish culture and all others.

"You are what you eat." That's what we say.

It was a holy menu for a holy people. Was it any wonder that unclean pagans ate such abominable selections from a filthy menu?

So imagine Peter's horror that day.

It's noontime, and a nice kosher lunch is being prepared below in the house. True, it is Simon's house — the tanner — a profession viewed as unclean in his culture due to its contact with dead animals. Perhaps Peter was even a bit happy with himself at how he was growing and being stretched in bypassing that taboo. Then the aroma of a freshly prepared meal begins to flirt with his nostrils. He prays in humble thanksgiving...

And then he sees it.

A great sheet...or was it a sail? Down it comes before his eyes, filled with entrees, many of which he's dined on before...but the rest are all expressly banned from the menu. Dietary taboos everywhere. Peter is ready to bolt from the vision. Then the Divine voice, "Rise, Peter, kill and eat." Three denials. Three repeated injunctions: "Don't call filthy what I've cleansed."

The great gap-bridging God bridges the great chasm in Peter's soul with three repeated strokes, revealing a new menu, a redefined *kashrut*, pointing back to what Jesus and the prophets had said all along: all nations, all peoples, none left out, none off limits.

And slowly Peter reaches out to dip into the dish...

2) There lived a Roman officer

Read. Acts 10:1-2 NLT

In Caesarea there lived a Roman army officer named Cornelius, who was a captain of the Italian Regiment. He was a devout, God-fearing man, as was everyone in his household. He gave generously to the poor and prayed regularly to God.

Read. Matthew 8:8-12 Message

Just give the order and my servant will be fine. I'm a man who takes orders and gives orders. I tell one soldier, 'Go,' and he goes; to another, 'Come,' and he comes; to my slave, 'Do this,' and he does it." Taken aback, Jesus said, "I've yet to come across this kind of simple trust in Israel, the very people who are supposed to know all about God and how he works. This man is the vanguard of many outsiders who will soon be coming from all directions—streaming in from the east, pouring in from the west, sitting down at God's kingdom banquet alongside Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Then those who grew up 'in the faith' but had no faith will find themselves out in the cold, outsiders to grace and wondering what happened."

Think.

- What would you expect a Roman centurion of an occupying army to be like? What would Luke's audience expect — the Jewish part of it and the Roman part of it? How does Cornelius break the mold? How does he compare with the centurion Jesus had encountered earlier? How do you think that earlier encounter might have prepared Peter for this one?
- How does Cornelius' life and character challenge you?

Pray.

Lord, give me new eyes to see you and trust you as if for the first time. Give me a stout and devout heart like Cornelius!

Live.

Meditate on Luke's description of Cornelius...and find ways to live it

4) Rise up, Peter, kill and eat

Read. Acts 10:9-16 NLT

The next day as Cornelius' messengers were nearing the town, Peter went up on the flat roof to pray. It was about noon, and he was hungry. But while a meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw the sky open, and something like a large sheet was let down by its four corners. In the sheet were all sorts of animals, reptiles, and birds. Then a voice said to him, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat them."

"No, Lord," Peter declared. "I have never eaten anything that our Jewish laws have declared impure and unclean."

But the voice spoke again: "Do not call something unclean if God has made it clean."

The same vision was repeated three times. Then the sheet was suddenly pulled up to heaven.

Think.

- How adventuresome are you when it comes to trying new foods? Why was the Lord's command here so hard for Peter to swallow? What does the fact that the vision appears to Peter three times tell you?
- Why does God communicate with Peter this way — why not just tell him that it's time for the Gentiles to be "brought into the fold" of the church?
- When has the Lord told you to do something really outrageous and "outside the box" of your expectations and perhaps even your religious upbringing? What happened?

Pray.

Lord, thank you for listening when we argue and balk and don't get it. Thank you for your patience and repeated efforts to get the message across to my all too often stubborn heart.

Live. Break a rut in your life...try something new in your God walk.

3) Send some men to Joppa

Read. Acts 10:3-8 NLT

One afternoon about three o'clock, he had a vision in which he saw an angel of God coming toward him. "Cornelius!" the angel said. Cornelius stared at him in terror. "What is it, sir?" he asked the angel. And the angel replied, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have been received by God as an offering!

Now send some men to Joppa, and summon a man named Simon Peter. He is staying with Simon, a tanner who lives near the seashore." As soon as the angel was gone, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier, one of his personal attendants. He told them what had happened and sent them off to Joppa.

Think.

- Describe Cornelius' vision. What does he see? What is he told? How does he respond? What do you find most striking in this whole scene?
- "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have been received by God as an offering." How often do you really sense your prayers are being heard? How often do you feel your giving is really making a difference? How might this story encourage you in this? How consistently do you live with a sense that heaven is really watching you — and is that a comfort or a terror to you?
- Have you ever had a "close encounter" like Cornelius does here? What is the role of angels in our world today?

Pray.

Lord, may the words of my mouth, the meditations of my heart and the deeds of my hands be a pleasing offering in your sight. Help me to live in the simple trust that you see, and that that's all that really matters.

Live.

Remind yourself throughout the day that heaven is watching.

5) Guests at Christ's table

Read. Romans 14:1-4 Message

Welcome with open arms fellow believers who don't see things the way you do. And don't jump all over them every time they do or say something you don't agree with—even when it seems that they are strong on opinions but weak in the faith department. Remember, they have their own history to deal with. Treat them gently. For instance, a person who has been around for a while might well be convinced that he can eat anything on the table, while another, with a different background, might assume he should only be a vegetarian and eat accordingly. But since both are guests at Christ's table, wouldn't it be terribly rude if they fell to criticizing what the other ate or didn't eat? God, after all, invited them both to the table. Do you have any business crossing people off the guest list or interfering with God's welcome? If there are corrections to be made or manners to be learned, God can handle that without your help.

Think.

- Is there anyone you would be uncomfortable seeing at Christ's table? How expansive would you say is your vision of the body of Christ? Short guest list or long? Why?
- How readily do you find yourself becoming a "Miss Manners" at God's table? How can you be a better guest at the table?
- What primary lessons have you learned this week from Cornelius and Peter? How will you apply these lessons?

Pray.

Lord, thank you for the ragamuffin table of grace you have set before us in Jesus — and for including me. Help me to embrace your new menu for my life and all the table guests you welcome.

Live.

Invite someone to join you at the table this week.