

Acts 11:1-18

Read the passage: [The Message](#) or [The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#).

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This passage is a great sermon illustration of how challenging to received traditions and social customs, "loving one another as I have loved you" can be.

We can accept the difficult challenge of loving those we are close to, but how should we regard those who are strangers and foreign; those who may have habits and customs that are repugnant to us. If they agree to become like us, they can be included in our responsibility to love. But are we to love them as we find them?

This passage comes at a time when the early community were still mainly Jewish and believed the followers of Jesus should continue to follow Jewish practices - maintaining kosher food, circumcision, etc. However, news had come that Peter had violated this. Why?

I love the CEV translation of verse 5. Instead of falling into a trance while praying, as most translation have it, in the CEV Peter falls sound asleep. Sure makes me feel more normal.

In terms of the vision, I am not sure of the significance of the sheet being held by the four corners, but the animals clearly represent clean and unclean animals mixed together. For us to understand how shocking this vision of "clean" and "unclean" animals mixed together instead of being strictly parted into two groups, imagine a sheet loaded with last week's garbage mixed together with this week's groceries. This is why Peter objects when instructed to kill and eat from the animals in the vision. Yech! But verse 9:

What God has made clean, you must not call profane

is the challenge to all accepted customs and traditions. The challenge being, how do we know for sure what God has made clean? In my view, this breaking down of barriers between "clean" and "unclean" is at the heart of the Good News of Jesus. God's love is for all without distinction.

This vision also raises an interesting question. Has God, with this instruction to Peter, just changed the Divine rules about clean and unclean? Or, has God, with this instruction to Peter, just opened Peter's eyes to see that the previous customs about clean and unclean were actually untrue all along - that in fact, **God** had never made any such distinctions? Either we have a case of God introducing some whole new way of being in the world that overthrows all custom and tradition up to that point. Or we have a case of all custom and tradition up to that point never having been in accordance with God's desire. In either case, we are left to wonder what customs, habits and traditions of our own might be undone by a new vision?

The emphasis on this being repeated three times is again a reminder that this instruction is final and complete. (Paralleling Peter's three denials, and three times re-affirming his love for Jesus.)

This opening of the community of followers of Jesus to the Gentiles (i.e., non-Jewish people), is a huge transition.

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