

Cornelius Invites Peter to Dinner

Acts 10

Lesson Highlights: We've seen in other stories: God's family is for everyone. But the rubber meets the road when faithful Jews have to decide if God is leading them to change how they express that faith--like eating with Gentiles, doing what would make them unclean. Peter's move to Cornelius is a big marker in showing: God isn't just favoring the Jewish people, God's moving with them out to the wider world.

STORY POEM

A special picture message
That Peter saw one day
"Time to eat together!"
Is what God had to say!

STORY : PRESCHOOL

Peter was one of Jesus' friends and helpers. After Jesus left earth, Jesus' friends and helpers kept on telling people about Jesus. "Jesus is alive!" They would say, "God is doing new, wonderful, amazing things!"

And God was doing even more than Peter expected.

One day God gave Peter a special picture message. The picture showed Peter lots of foods. People in God's family ate some foods, but not others. This was one way they loved and followed God. They also ate with other people in God's family--called Jewish people. They did not eat with people from other groups.

But the special picture message had a mix of foods--the kinds Peter usually ate and the kind that were not allowed! Peter also heard a voice said, "Eat whatever you'd like."

"No, no! I only eat the foods God wants me to eat!" Peter said.

But the voice said it again! "Eat whatever you'd like."

What a strange picture message! What could it mean? Peter was wondering this when there was a knock at the door.

Knock, knock, knock!

Peter went to the door and opened it, and there were two men there who said, "We were sent by Cornelius to ask you to come to dinner, please."

Cornelius was an important man who wanted to know more about God. But he was not Jewish. Peter was Jewish. They normally would not eat together, ever! Peter wondered, "Should I say yes and go to dinner at Cornelius' house?" He remembered the special picture message. He knew what it meant!

Even though Peter was Jewish and ate special foods, and Cornelius was not Jewish and did not eat the same foods, Peter should say yes and come to dinner. They should eat together. And then Peter could tell everyone at dinner about God, which it turns out, is exactly why he was invited.

So Peter went with the men to Cornelius' house and they all ate dinner together. Peter told Cornelius and all the other guests about God's love and how Jesus was alive. He told them about the special picture message and said, "I know God loves everyone and today reminded me just how much!"

STORY: ELEMENTARY

Jesus had a friend and disciple named Peter. After Jesus left earth to go back to heaven, Peter had a big part to play in helping Jesus' followers carry on. They knew some things: Jesus was alive. That meant the kingdom he talked about—the place that's not on a map, but where people live together like God is really king—that kingdom had come to earth. It was anywhere, everywhere that people practiced loving God, loving each other, and even loving their enemies. No one had to get that perfect, because God is so full of grace and kindness that perfect is just silliness. But they were going to carry on together living like this kingdom was really truly home, wherever they were.

They also didn't know some things. They didn't know exactly how it would work for the people who joined in to be a mix of Jewish and not-Jewish people. Peter was Jewish. Jesus was Jewish. At first all the disciples were Jewish. But that was changing, which wasn't really too surprising, when they remembered that God's dream was always for the whole world to know what God was like, how loved they were, and to enjoy living from those truths.

But even if it wasn't surprising, it was tricky. See, the way the Jewish people as a group lived together was unique. They wore particular clothes and did not wear others. They set up their week to work on particular days but did not work at all on one of them. And importantly for our story today, they ate particular foods and did not eat others. They also did not eat with people who didn't do the same. Like non-Jewish people.

One day Peter went up to the roof to pray. (Roofs were flat.) While he was praying, the Bible says he went into a trance and saw a vision.

What do you think that was like? Like Bruno's cave?

In the vision, he saw something like a sheet, and it was unfolding down to reveal that inside were all sorts of animals. Then a voice told Peter, "Get up and eat what you'd like."

Um. No. Nopity nope nope nope. Because those animals? They are NOT on the menu of foods Jewish people eat.

So the voice repeated the words. Do you think it was a command? A direction? Or more like permission? An invitation? Both?

The voice said something else. "What God has made clean," said the voice, coming now for a second time, "you must not regard as common." And this all happened 3 times.

Peter's vision ended, and just then, down below at the front door, there was a knock. "We are here from Cornelius' house," said a servant. "He would like for Peter to come to his home to eat with him. He wants to hear more about this Jesus."

Ooh! A dinner invite!

One problem. Do you have a guess what it is?

Cornelius is not Jewish. And here's a big moment for Peter. For always, he's known that God is special and unique, and he's lived in ways that were special and unique too. That was how he showed his love and trust for God. Cornelius' house, the food from his kitchen, it would not be 'clean' in the way that Jewish customs would need it to be.

But something's happening here. The vision. The invitation.

If you are Peter—what are you thinking or feeling right now?

Well the Bible says God's Spirit tells him: 3 men are looking for you, Peter lets what he's seeing about God and hearing from God lead the way, like taking him by the hand and holding on tight while he walks into something new and risky and unknown. It's just dinner. But it's not. It's the beginning of something totally new for Jesus' followers. It changes their whole idea of what it means to carry on living together loving God and each other in their regular lives. (Because it's always our regular lives, of course.)

We are always getting to know God more and more, which means sometimes what we thought about God changes. It was true for Peter, it's true for the grown ups here, and it will be true for you.

Peter went with them, met Cornelius and a bunch of other people who he'd invited to his home. And there's more to the story—it's a good one!--but for now, listen to what Peter notices about God through all this. "It's become clear to me," he said, "that God really does show no favoritism."

WONDER QUESTIONS

1. I wonder if Peter's vision made him hungry?
2. I wonder what the sheet looked like?
3. I wonder if Cornelius worried Peter wouldn't come?

Key Question: Every Bible story tells us something about who God is or what God's like. What did you notice this time?

ACTIVITIES

Make your own dinner plate:

Print the sheet or create your own 'placemat' and invite kids to draw their favorite foods. As they do, talk about the story. Say things like, "Peter went to eat with Cornelius, because God showed him that was what he should do! Everyone eating together made God happy!"

Play with kitchens, foods, picnics, and meals.

Sit in a circle. If you are with just one kid, make a circle of suffies/dolls. Invite kids to pat their knees and repeat after you. Every time you ask "Who can come?" pick a person/stuffie in the group and point to them. If you'd like, say their name instead of 'you'. I'm having a dinner party. I want to invite everybody who can come to dinner

with me? You can come to dinner with me! After you go around the circle, say, For Peter, it was not easy to know if he should have dinner with Cornelius, but God helped him know to say yes. Everyone ate together, and that helped so many people know God's big love!

Recipe Round Up!

Supplies: 1 paper and pen(cil)

Make a "recipe". The first person writes an ingredient—remember how much!, then folds the paper to hide what they wrote and passes the paper along. The next person adds to it, folds, and passes. Depending on how many contributors you have, adjust.

Just 2? Pass it back and forth 3 times each.

Big group? Have multiple recipes going around the circle.

When you've finished, read the recipe and name your creation.

Food Free For All

Supplies: Pillowcase and pretend or durable, light, real food (for instance, jumbo marshmallows work well)

Since food came down in a sheet in Peter's vision, try it with a pillowcase! Play a catch and toss game where one person tosses food (real or pretend) and the other tries to catch it with the pillowcase.

PRAY

Go to the spot where you eat most of your meals.

Say, Did you know that the dinner table is a very important place in God's story? At Passover, the special meal in the Exodus, we become the people God freed. Eating daily manna and quail, we become people God cared for. Drinking wedding wine at Cana, we become people God's made joyful. Eating bread in an upper room, we become friends with messiah Jesus. Eating unclean food in a Centurion's house, we become people who don't exclude anyone from God's family. At the table, over meals, people become who God hopes they'll be.

So today, we're going to pray for our table. I'm going to play you a song, then I'll say Amen. (or, We'll read the words of a song as our prayer, then I'll say Amen.)

Lyrics: "We Say Grace" by Amanda Held Opelt.

We say grace, grace over this table
Grace over this feast,
grace over the souls who share it.

Grace over every friend,
the tongues who will receive
And the hands that have prepared it.

Grace, grace as we converse
Share our joys and hurts
Quarrel and discuss
Give us grace, grace to fill our hearts
May we all be marked by this membership of love.

We say grace, grace over the laborers
Working row by row
Grace over our nations gardens

Grace over every road where our food has traveled
Grace over our stores and markets

Grace, grace over the fields
That bless us with their yield
Grace over the dirt
We say grace, grace over the skies
For when the world is dry
Through the rain the heavens meet earth.