



Middle Monthly

August 2023

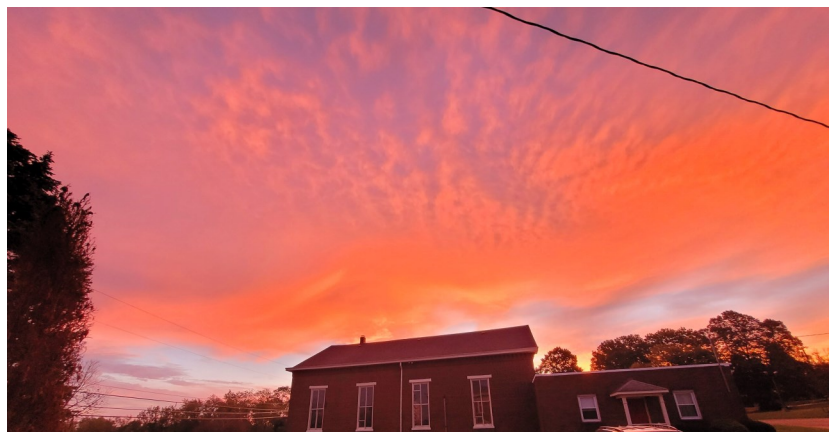
From the Pastor's Porch...

Summer seems to be tagging along this year quite quickly. The roundabout construction has been entertaining, in the least of ways, however, each opportunity to deal with backed up traffic is an opportunity to practice patience. It's also a good time to pray.

There's always a bit to be done. Power washing the porch, putting furniture together, painting, cleaning, mowing, etc. These are just the things we do. There are always other things to be done as well. Spiritual things. The more important things in life. Checking in on folks, praying for folks, visiting the sick, volunteering around, inviting strangers to church, (something that does happen from time to time). In this short newsletter write-up, I am simply reminded that even when everything seems very busy, very crazy, very overwhelming, it isn't so with God. And that would be why God is greater than anything and everything.

As you enjoy the last month of summer before "school begins" and all the latter end of year things start to pick up, take some time, find an evening and a spot to watch the sun-set. As the sun-sets, think about the beauty of the earth and how it adores its Creator.

Be Blessed and a Blessing,
Pastor James



Continuing our Acts Series

As the church moves forward beyond the Jewish community, God shows Peter that he is doing a new thing in the world through the gospel. Ask yourself, “What cultural rules guide my acceptance and interaction with others whom I see as ‘unclean’?”

Read: Acts 10:1-48

The last two decades have seen a trend among the Indian “untouchable” (Dalit) caste: they are converting en masse to Christianity. In India, the caste system separates people by category and doesn’t allow for fluidity of movement between castes. You are born into a caste, and you die in a caste. But Indian Christians welcome the untouchables into their number and accept them as their own. Drawn by this acceptance and a chance to escape discrimination and abuse, thousands across India have been converting. In the Surkhet district of Nepal, for example, approximately fifty thousand Dalits have converted from Hinduism to Christianity, in part to escape the discrimination they have known all their lives. As you read in the passage, Peter demonstrates the Christian faith is open to people from all walks of life.

In Acts 10 we see the story of the Roman centurion Cornelius, who is drawn to faith in Jesus. He sends for Peter, and the apostle shares the gospel with him. Peter’s message to Cornelius is found in Acts 10:34–43. One of the first things that stands out about Peter’s proclamation is that the substance is the same as his earlier sermons to his fellow Jews! Whether Peter is proclaiming the faith to a Jewish leader—even the high priest himself—or to a gentile Roman centurion, the substance of the message remains essentially unchanged: Jesus was a man of great power who was crucified, but then he rose from the dead, and now there is forgiveness in his name.

There is an application point for us here: the gospel is a message for all people. We can’t discard part of it in certain times and places. Rather, the same gospel is to be shared with all people. This doesn’t mean the message is communicated the same way. For example, in his conversation with Cornelius, Peter doesn’t spend a long time appealing to the Old Testament prophets, as he did in Acts 2. There isn’t just one way to share the gospel—but the gospel shared should be the same, regardless of the people to whom we are extending the good news.

Though the core message is the same, there is a new emphasis in the application of the gospel here: that “God shows no partiality” (v. 34). What does this mean? Cornelius was a gentile and therefore not part of the people of God. He wasn’t included in God’s covenant with the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Jewish ceremonial laws governed Jewish

thought and practice on what was “clean” or “unclean,” from food to clothes to the people one could associate with. These laws helped visually and physically reinforce that God is holy and uncommon; to be in his presence meant doing everything possible to avoid contamination from sin. Gentiles were considered to be in an unclean state. (This is discussed at length in Tim Keller, *Evangelism: Studies in the Book of Acts* [New York: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2005], 87–91). But Peter realizes in his divine encounter with Cornelius that this is no longer the case! What God has made clean, let no one declare unclean (v. 15)!

A song speaks about this truth: “Rich man or poor man, bonded or free. The ground was leveled that day at Calvary” (Beverly Lowry, “The Ground Is Level,” 2000, <https://www.musicnotes.com/sheetmusic/mtd.asp?ppn=MN0080847>). The cross of Christ is the great leveler: despite your background, your sin, your successes, your failures, your ethnicity, when you come to the cross of Christ, you are made new. Peter proclaimed the gospel on that day and realized the truth of an impartial God. Paul would later celebrate that same truth when he declared, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

This was not an easy lesson for Peter to learn. God prepared Peter’s heart before meeting Cornelius, revealing a vision to Peter which he repeated three times: “What God has made clean, do not call common.” In the vision, God showed Peter the ritually unclean animals that the Jews were taught to avoid. Can you imagine how hard it would be to let go of a teaching from God that had guided your nation’s identity and worship for hundreds and hundreds of years? Perhaps there was significance in God’s triple repetition; after all, Peter had denied knowing Jesus three times; Jesus had reinstated Peter by asking him “Do you love me? Then feed my sheep” three times (see John 21:15–19). Perhaps in repeating this vision three times, Jesus is saying, “I know it will be hard for you to believe this message is coming from me. But this is how I want you to trust me, to love me, and to feed my sheep. And I’m using this special pattern only you and I know about to confirm that this message truly is from God.”

What people group within your specific community does your church consciously or unconsciously treat as unclean? Whom does the church avoid? What about individual members of the church—what types of people do they stay away from, for whatever reason? Do they think Christians should have nothing to do with these people? How does that align with the proclamation of Peter on that day to the gentile Cornelius?

What's Happening in MidKids



Upcoming MidKids Worship Topics:

- Parable of the Widow's Offering
- Parable of the Talents
- God is Joy

MidKids at the Food Pantry

Both children and adults had fun volunteering again at the Mount Pleasant Food Pantry in July. Thank you to all the folks who took time out of their summer schedules to help feed the hungry in our community!

Back to School

School will soon be just around the corner and therefore, our fall activities will start up again. Sunday School will be back in session starting September 3. Plus, **MidKids at Pleasant Manor will be held every Monday beginning September 11th from 6-7pm.** Until then, enjoy the last bit of summer!

MidKids Q&A: Is God calling me to serve on the MidKids Team?

MidKids Team members work in partnership with families to raise up children to know Jesus. Children need examples of people who have made a commitment to Christ and whole-heartedly serve God. That's what our volunteers do. Surprisingly, children are not the only ones on the receiving end. In children's ministry, teachers gain joy, satisfaction, and witness God's beauty in the hearts of children. So, is this for you? Let's see some options.

A regular, once-a-week teacher has an opportunity to create unique and incredible bonds with their students. Children get to know a caring leader who is consistently there for them to guide them as a faith mentor. They build rich relationships which enhance learning and growth. These volunteers offer a labor of love, and consequently, kids' lives are changed.

In addition to the regular weekly teachers, in MidKids Ministry we also employ volunteers on a monthly or bi-monthly rotation. This option is great for the volunteer who may not be able to commit to serving every week. It allows you an opportunity to serve within your busy time limitations. It also gives volunteers a chance to still attend some adult ministries like worship and Bible study. This method also helps keep the ministry fresh and energized.

Consider your options. If you think children's ministry might be where God is calling you to serve, then stop by the MidKids desk to sign up.



THANK YOU!

Your generosity helped us to raise \$294 for the Union Mission in Latrobe! Thank you for

COMMUNION DATES

- * Aug. 6
- * Sept. 3
- * Oct. 1
- * Nov. 5



SUMMER BIBLE STUDY

@ Middle Church

Introducing Christian Ethics

- August 6th, August 20th

4 Prayers ~ 4 Minutes

You are invited to join the church in praying together on the following things in August. It can take just 4 minutes.



1. Pray for the members of our church family, that we continue to walk with the Lord in all we do.
2. Pray for anyone who is considering volunteering here or for other mission work outside of Middle.
3. Pray for the youth of the church. That they have strong roots of faith to maintain a positive witness throughout the upcoming school year.
4. Pray for church leaders. Pray that they will be strong in their own faith, and able to be discerning and caring when leading others.



SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		1	2	3	4	5 Men's Group Family Cookout 1:00PM
6 Communion Summer Bible Study 6PM	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18 Back to School Bonfire with Pastor James 5PM	19
20 Staff Mtg 9AM Final Summer Bible Study 6PM	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

SUMMER SUNDAY SCHEDULE

(unless otherwise noted)

Crossroads Café/Fellowship- 10:00AM
Sunday Worship/MidKids Worship- 10:30AM