



Saint John United Methodist Church
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Message for October 24, 2021
“Storyline: Cornelius”
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: Acts 10:1-8

Taking Orders

I didn't serve in the military but am extremely thankful for those who have. We owe them all a deep debt of gratitude.

Those in the military are used to taking orders. It just comes with the territory. The very effectiveness of any army is predicated on subordinates following orders.

I love the story of the Centurion that sought the help of Jesus in healing his beloved servant. You can find that account in Luke 7:1-10 or Matthew 8:5-13.

A Centurion was a Roman soldier who had responsibility over a hundred men, hence the name. A Centurion held a very important place in the ranks of the Roman legion. Centurions both received orders from their superiors and gave them to their subordinates. By so doing, they helped things move along in the same direction. Giving and receiving orders was simply a way of life for a Centurion. The Centurion that sought out Jesus' help in Luke 7 and Matthew 8 knew the value of following orders.

Matthew has it that the Centurion said to Jesus, *“Just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.”* (Matthew 8:8-9)

The Centurion knew it was that way with Jesus. In a word, the Centurion recognized Christ's authority. He knew that all that Christ needed to do was say the word and it would be done.

Jesus marveled at that kind of faith. *“I tell you the truth,”* he said, *“I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.”* (Matthew 8:10)

And as we know from scripture, the Centurion's servant was healed that day. The Centurion put his faith in the authority of Christ to make things different. Christ is able to do the very same thing in our own lives when we place our faith in him.

This morning we read about another Centurion, one also with a great deal of faith. This Centurion also knew what it meant to give and receive orders. He knew what it meant to leave himself open to the authority of God. He was ready, able, and willing to do God's bidding.

This morning we read about Cornelius and how on account of his obedience not only was his life changed, but the very focus of the church moving forward. Let's hear then this reading from Acts.

Acts 10:1-8

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!"

Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked.

The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea."

When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.

A Deep Desire to Follow God

As we have already stated, Cornelius knew what it meant to follow orders. That sort of thing not only played out in his life as a soldier, but his in his spiritual life as well. Cornelius was deeply devoted to God. His every desire was to follow him. Cornelius dedicated himself regularly to prayer. He regularly gave to the poor. Cornelius was a good man.

The scripture reports that Cornelius was "God-fearing." A "God-fearer" was one who followed the Jewish faith but was not born a Jew. A "God fearer" believed in God and respected the moral and ethical teachings of the Jews, without being a Jew by blood. As a "God-fearer," Cornelius continually left himself open to God's direction and because of that God was honored and Cornelius was blessed. Cornelius' prayers and gifts to the poor did not go unnoticed. We'll hear a bit more about that later.

Remember this: Great things happen when we leave ourselves open to the movement of God.

Let's see how that played out for Cornelius. Like others of the Jewish faith, Cornelius paused to pray every afternoon at 3:00. How's that sort of thing playing out in your life? Do you regularly set aside time for prayer?

For Cornelius, it was during one of those regular afternoon prayer times that an angel of the Lord appeared to Cornelius and called him by name, to which Cornelius immediately responded.

"What is it, Lord?" he asked. Which is another way of saying, "What is it you want me to do? How can I help? Say the word and it's as good as done."

It was also here that Cornelius was commended for his devotion. Cornelius was not only a good soldier, but a faithful follower as well. He was ready to trust and obey, even though he may not have fully understood what was going on. There's a direct correlation between seeking God above all else like Cornelius did and being blessed with a call from God.

I can't stress enough the importance of leaving ourselves open to God's call. Down through the years I have met with any number of people who were sensing a call from God, and almost every time I counseled them to be sure to "keep your eyes and ears open to what God has in store."

Storyline

As you know, during this present series we have been hearing from people who have kept *“their eyes and ears open”* to God’s movement.

Today we hear from Michael Belt. I know for a fact that he has stayed at it when it comes to being connected to God. He has left himself open to what God has in store. And most recently, has responded to God’s call by taking a position with GO Ministries.

Welcome, if you will, Michael Belt. ***(Michael Belt’s testimony not included)***

Everyone Was Listening

Let’s hear some more about Cornelius’ storyline. As we have already said, Cornelius was quick to listen to what God had in store for him.

His storyline was that the angel of the Lord appeared to him while he prayed and told him to send two servants and one of his soldiers to Joppa to the house of Simon the Tanner. That was the place where Peter was staying. The three were instructed to bring Peter back to Cornelius.

The next day, while the two servants and the one soldier were on their way to Joppa, Peter had a vision of a large sheet descending from heaven, filled with all sorts of animals that in the eyes of a Jew were unclean.

Peter was instructed to eat them. Rather than say, “Yes,” Peter equivocated. *“Surely not, I have never eaten anything unclean.”*

Eventually, after three times Peter God the message.

“Don’t call anything impure that God has made clean.”

It was then that the two servants and one soldier arrived at the door to take Peter to Cornelius. It was also then that Peter became convinced that God was on the move. Peter went with them, and upon meeting Cornelius and his household, preached a clear and concise sermon about the good news of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection.

Cornelius and his household were saved that day. Not only were they saved, but Peter was won over to the fact that the good news about Jesus was not just for Jews, but Gentiles alike.

Acts 10 marks an important point for the outreach of the Early New Testament Church. Because of God’s good work in Peter’s life, made possible by the obedience of Cornelius, the Great Commission of *“going into all the world and making disciples”* was begun in earnest.

I don’t know about you, but I sure am glad everybody was listening that day. Again, great things happen when we listen and leave ourselves open to the movement of God.