**Gospel**: John 15:9-17

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. 10If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. 11I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. 12“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. 14You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. 16You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. 17I am giving you these commands so that you may **love one another**.

**Message:** Be Open (Read all of Acts 10)

*How do I love thee? Let me count the ways. I love thee to the depth and breadth and height my soul can reach . . . and if God choose, I shall love thee better after death*. These familiar words were written by Elizabeth Barrett Browning for Robert Browning. Perhaps it would be an interesting meditation or conversation with Jesus Christ to consider how or even IF we love him to the depth and breadth and height our souls can reach in this mortal life and beyond. Begin with how vast or narrow is your world, your daily ventures into the neighborhood, the extent of your travels beyond local, the quantity and quality of your reading, the variety of your experiences, the numerous people you have met. All of these and more serve to broaden or enlarge one’s persona and one’s perspective. All of these and more offer a glimpse of the magnitude of God and the fact that in this life, the depth, breadth and height our souls can reach is limited.

The ancient Hebrews, while trying to maintain a purity of devotion and worship to the one true God, in becoming a unique set-apart people of God and protecting the people from the taint and temptation of false gods and foreign practices, enacted laws that restricted. For example, prohibiting marriage out side of the faith. Close association with Gentiles was seriously frowned upon for the same reasons. For the very devout, avoiding temptation and maintaining ritual purity required a great deal of time and effort. Michvahs, ritual baths, for instance, had one side of the stairs for going into the bath and the other side for coming out. If you are coming out, **do not** touch one who is coming in or it’s back down the stairs and into the cleansing waters. Some michvahs had two sets of stairs. For a few extra bucks, problem solved. There are those today who think that baptisms must be performed in a specific way or the person has not properly received baptism. The same goes for Communion: the service must be conducted according to all specifics or one did not receive it at all. Unless a student meeting all the requirements is ordained according to a particular formula, they are not ordained of God at all. So it goes. Jesus made it abundantly clear that the laws of Sabbath and other rituals were made for people, not people, for the Sabbath. Ceremonial law is secondary to something larger and more inclusive and of far greater importance. Ceremonial laws point to God; they do not replace God. The law of love is first. God’s Love is inclusive and forgiving.

What is of far greater importance, this inclusive love, is finally becoming a reality to Peter. Peter had this vision of all the creatures from four-footed furries to creepy crawlers that God said were OK to eat. You are familiar with some of the Jewish dietary laws, which foods to eat, how to prepare them, and how to combine them. McDonalds is OUT—cannot have a cheeseburger. Cannot eat meat and dairy at the same meal. I don’t know why. (Dining room buffet in Israel: dairy products on one side of the room, meats on the other side, vegetables and fruit in the middle to separate. Do not take the red button elevator on the Sabbath—stops at every floor so they don’t have to push the button—considered “work.”) At the peak of Peter’s vision, God says that these items are clean and because God has made them clean, they are not to be considered profane, dirty, or blasphemous. This revelation is about to be put to the test. Three men arrived from Caesarea. They are not merely Gentiles; they are Roman Gentiles. They tell of the vision their centurion, a godly and generous man, has experienced a visitation from an angel who said he, the centurion, should hear what Peter has to say about Jesus of Nazareth. What do you have to say about Jesus of Nazareth?

Peter obeyed God and instantly broke one of the purity laws by inviting these Roman Gentiles **into his house** and gave them lodging. He could have shown hospitality to strangers by offering food outside his house, by providing a tent. He invited them, Roman Gentiles—profane people according to Jewish law, **into his house**! Whom might we consider profane or unclean today? *(General Conference legislation: The Book of Discipline will be updated to reflect the changes in legislation voted on during General Conference including elimination of the language that prevents LGBTQ+ clergy from being ordained* ***and*** *elimination of the language that prohibits UMC clergy from performing same-gender weddings.*) God shows no ***partiality***—a word from the Hebrew that means “to lift the face.” Those who “fear” God, who look to God in awe, recognizing God’s majesty and power, extolling (praising) God, those who lift their face to God in order to be guided to do what is right, are acceptable to God. Those who don’t, we keep working on by the grace and encouragement of God.

Peter went with the three men and a few Jewish-Christians from Joppa to the home of Cornelius in Caesarea (a 30-mile walk) where he was greeted by Cornelius, his relatives, and some close friends. He proceeded to speak as God had given utterance. Peter’s message is a **great outline** for all of us to follow; tweak as the Spirit advises in any given situation. Peter preached **peace** by Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all! We’ll get to that “Peace” that passes all understanding in a moment. He told of Jesus of Nazareth, whom God had anointed and filled to overflowing with the Holy Spirit, (*all the fullness of God*) traveled throughout the country doing good deeds and healing all who suffered. We have the Gospels that document these deeds, Luke in particular. Read the Gospels so you too can tell of Jesus’ good deeds and healings. Tell of Jesus’ good deeds in your life! We are also called, not only to tell of these deeds, but to do good deeds and healings ourselves. We may not heal someone as instantly as Jesus did with the lepers or cripples or restore to life, but we may alleviate suffering and promote healing in other ways. Peter continued to tell that he had witnessed Jesus’ crucifixion and, **especially**, witnessed the risen Christ. He shared that he had eaten and drank with the risen Christ. We, through faith, believe the **mystery** of the resurrection (all part of God’s power beyond our understanding, why God is God and we’re not) and in that belief, we experience the risen Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. In a few moments we will eat and drink with the risen Christ in the service of Word and Table. How else have you experienced the risen Christ? (I’ll wait.) One more thing Peter said God had commanded those witnesses to preach: Jesus **is** the **one** ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. We will see Jesus face to face and we will be held accountable in this life and the next.

The Peace of Jesus Christ comes to us when we recognize and embrace Jesus as Lord of all, which includes us and all that is our being. We give our life to Christ to send us or not, to use us or not. As John Wesley prayed: *I am no longer my own, but yours. Put me to what you will, place me with whom you will. Put me to doing, put me to suffering. Let me be put to work for you or set aside for you, Praised for you or criticized for you. Let me be full, let me be empty. Let me have all things, let me have nothing. I freely and fully surrender all things to your glory and service. And now, O wonderful and holy God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, you are mine, and I am yours. So be it.* How do I love thee, O Lord? Let me count the ways.

**Prayers of the People**: Holy and Eternal God, our lives are in your hands for your good purpose. You commit to us continuously working for us and with us. We, in turn, commit our lives to you, as you have assured us that, while we are intent on your will, you listen to our wants. Fill us with compassion for others who suffer in so many ways that we may ease their burden and offer glad hope of the children of eternity. Let us always and joyfully sing our praise of you and all your mighty deeds in our lives for you are our beginning and our ending, through Jesus Christ who continues to teach us to pray, “Our Father . . .”

**Prayer of Thanksgiving**: God of Promise and God of Unity, thank you for being the Spirit of renewal. Pour out your Spirit on us that we may be your instruments of help and support for those who have less. Bless these gifts that they may bring others to knowledge of you, in Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Benediction**: The peace of God that passes all understanding be with you now and forever. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, go in God’s peace to love and serve the Lord.

**New Testament**: Acts 10:44-48

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. 45The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, 46for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, 47“Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” 48So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.

**Epistle**: 1 John 5:1-6

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. 2By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. 3For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, 4for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. 5Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? 6This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth.