

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

[God Shows No Partiality]

In today’s reading from Acts, Peter made an important realization,
which he shared with the Jews and Gentiles who gathered to hear him speak:

*“Truly I understand that God shows no partiality,
but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.”*

Salvation was not just for the Jews!

(Acts 10:34)

That was big news, because citizens and subjects of the Roman Empire were differentiated by:
country of origin, skin color,
language and dialect, dontchaknow.

(The little girl in the courtyard of the High Priest knew Peter was a follower of
Jesus from the funny way he talked.)

The Roman Empire was diverse.

Instead of being celebrated, diversity in the Roman Empire was often cause for discord.

In that past year alone, Peter witnessed terrible abuses of authority,
violent demonstrations in the streets,
injustices done to neighbors simply because they were ‘different,’
an innocent man put to death.

Can you imagine such a world?

Perhaps you don’t have to.

The Good News is that Christ’s death wasn’t just for God’s chosen nation, but for **all** people.
No worldly difference presents a barrier to His love.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his Son.”

(John 3:16)

“Truly,” Peter said. “I understand that God shows no partiality.”

[Fear God]

But that’s not the end of Peter’s message.

Consider the second half of his sentence:

“but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.”

Peter identifies two things necessary for one to be considered ‘acceptable to God:’

- 1. Fear God**
- 2. Do what is right**

The first one is straightforward enough: **Fear God.**

We have one of the top universities in the world just a few miles away.
Students come here to be made wise.

But humanity's greatest wisdom is available right here, in the Scriptures.

As the Proverb goes: "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*" (Proverbs 1)

That makes sense.

If God is your Lord, your Maker,
the One who brought you into this world and can take you out of it,
then there can be no greater wisdom than to *fear* what He can do.

It is no wonder, then, that the Catechism teaches us that:

"*We should **fear**, love and trust in God above all things.*" (Small Catechism, 1st Commandment)

The **non-believer** should truly fear God's judgement and wrath. Jesus said:

"*Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.
Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*" (Matthew 10:28)

Of course, when we get wise in the Scriptures,
we **believers** get wise to God's true nature: Love.

For believers, the 'fear of God' is simply acknowledging Jesus Christ as Lord.
Recognizing that we are *not* the 'masters of our fate,' nor the 'captains of our souls.'
And so we demonstrate fear for God by sharing his love, submitting to Him.

[Failure to Fear]

Except for when we don't, of course...

We often want to tell God that we know how things ought to go.
We like to think that if we gain enough wisdom or work really hard,
We can *change* things—

make America or the entire world the way we want it to be.

Fix the economy.

Save the environment.

Have a comfy life.

Maybe toss in a little bit of God on the side— when it's convenient.

That's the opposite of fearing God.

The only way to salvation is to repent of that right now.

Each one of us is called to examine our own lives and seek God's forgiveness.

[And Do What Is Right]

That brings up Peter's second point from that day:

"*Truly I understand that God shows no partiality,
but in every nation anyone who fears him **and does what is right** is acceptable to him.*"

Anyone else's "Lutheran senses" tingling?

We Lutherans know "doing what's right" cannot contribute to our salvation. (Small Catechism, Third Article)

Peter is not talking about how we're saved.

He's further expounding on how God 'shows no partiality' to any group of people:

Anyone can ‘do what is right,’ so there is no racial barrier for the Gospel.

In fact, racism itself is opposed to the gospel. Racism is sin.

“*Well, Vicar Stein, that’s obvious,*” you might think.

“*You made that point at the beginning. And we are not racist here.*”

Indeed, by and large we do not commit that sin of *literal* racism

any more than we likely commit that 5th commandment sin of *literal* murder.

But we are *by nature* sinful and unclean.

If we break one commandment, we’ve broken them all.

It is never enough to simply *not sin*, but rather, we are called to *do good*.

In the Catechism, each of the Ten Commandments has an explanation.

It starts with a simple command to *fear God*: “**We should fear and love God so we do not...**”

It ends with a positive encouragement and *do what is right*: “**but we should...**”

That second part is always the hardest.

We can apply that pattern to any sin. Racism, for example:

Thou shalt not be racist.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God so that we do not hate our neighbor for the color of his skin, his nationality, or the peculiarities of his culture—

That part is easy enough.

Then comes the difficult encouragement:

—**but we should...** what? How does one undo racism?

We *should* witness in love, just as Christ sent His Apostles to do to the Gentiles.

And as Peter explained just a few sentences later:

“*[Jesus] commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To Him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.*” (Acts 10:42-43)

“Doing what is right,” as Peter says, is not an option.

We are to obey God’s commandments,

Both their *prohibitions*, and their *encouragements*.

Not because we want to earn a place in heaven— we know that’s not possible.

But because refusing to “do what is right” means losing our faith.

[Faith & Works]

The relationship between faith and works is important for us to remember.

Yes, “Faith alone saves,” but a saving faith is never alone.

This is what Peter preached.

After Peter’s sermon, the Holy Spirit came upon the Gentiles.

By the Spirit’s power, they spoke in languages they never learned!

Proof that God accepted them, even though they weren’t Jewish like the Twelve.

When we obey God's Laws, the same happens to us.
We may not literally speak in languages we never learned,
But we speak in a language of love for our neighbors.
Our good works show that we believe salvation is the most important thing.
Our good works give evidence of the faith that is in us.

[We are witnesses]

We will fail to obey God's Law from time to time—we are sinners, after all.
Then it is time to go back and confess our sins again.
Through faith, all who come to Jesus are forgiven.
No matter where they come from,
or what they look like,
or how they speak.

In a few moments we will profess our faith in the words of the Apostles Creed.
You will confess Jesus to be your Lord.
You will recall what he has done.
Consider how you demonstrate fear of Him.
Consider how you live that witness to the world,
So you may *always be ready to give answer for the hope that is in you.* (1 Peter 3:15)

Peter gave his hearers a challenge:
"We are witnesses of all that He did," he said.
*"Christ commanded us to preach to the people
and to witness that He is the one appointed by God
to be judge of the living and the dead."*

Are we witnessing about the Word of God?
What are you doing to *"Lift high the Cross, the love of Christ proclaim?"*
How do you *"Declare His glory among the nations,
His marvelous deeds among the people?"*

Brothers and sisters, demonstrate your saving faith.
You are Christ's; share His love with the world!
Do what is right.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

**Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous deeds among the people. Amen! (Psalm 96:3)**
