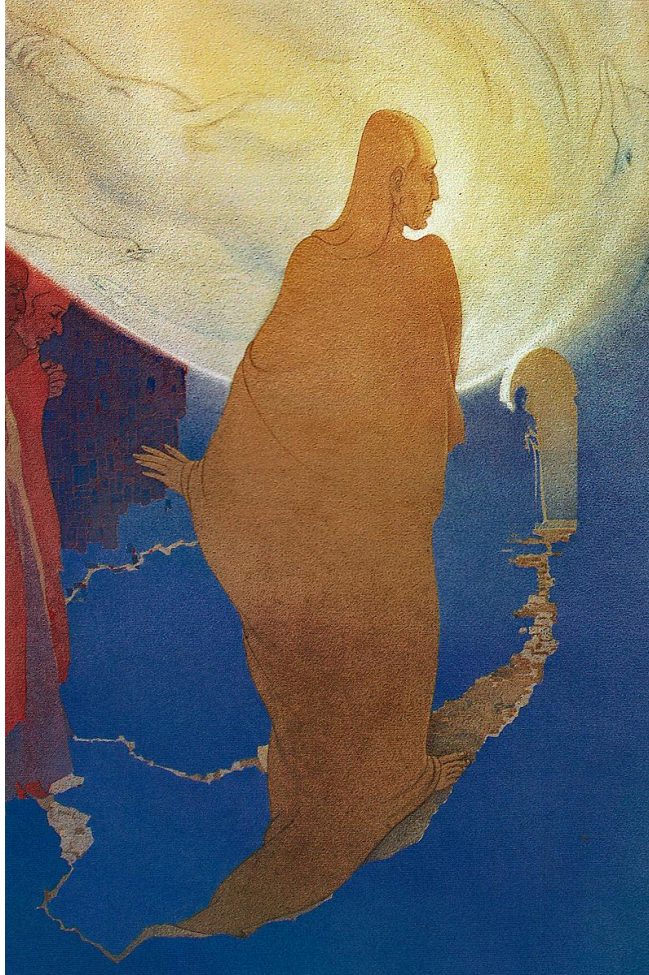


Chapter 13

Relationship with Society: Inter-ethnic Reconciliation



PAINTING: Frank Wesley (Indian, 1923-2002), *Peter's Vision*

Opening Question: Where is God inviting you to build bridges across cultural, ethnic, or ideological divides?

DEBRIEF

Have group members repeat the memory verse and share how they did with asking the Lord to show them hidden prejudices and list groups with whom they feel uncomfortable as they arrive. Open with prayer for the Spirit to illuminate the group during the study.

HEAR THE WORD

The larger context of this story is the history of the Jewish people living among non-Jewish or “Gentile” nations.

In New Testament times, Israel (Palestine) had been ruled by different Gentile empires for almost 600 years; first the Babylonians, then the Persians, then the Greeks, and now the Romans.

In 63 B.C., Rome took rule of Palestine. The Roman occupation is described as follows: “When the Roman army occupied a land, it was accompanied by thousands of civilians (wives, children, doctors, merchants, etc.). The army lived off the occupied country, pilfering its natural resources, enslaving members of its population, raping women and generally terrorizing the populace.”¹

Pontius Pilate became governor in 26 AD; he repeatedly clashed with the Jews. In the Bible, it is reported that on one occasion, he killed Jews in Galilee and mixed their blood with blood of the sacrifices (Luke 13:1).

Many Jews never associated with Gentiles because they thought Gentiles were religiously unclean. They looked down on the Gentiles as people who were outside of God’s salvation and blessings promised in the Old Testament. They looked forward to the day when the Messiah would come and deliver them from Gentile rule.

Even though Peter was committed to spreading Jesus’ Good News to his own people, Israel, after Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, his understanding about what Good News was and who it is for was still very limited. God expanded his horizon in a very unexpected way, however, by guiding him to people with whom he would never have been willing to associate with before. God had directed a Gentile seeker named Cornelius to send a message to Peter.

At the beginning of this chapter, we learn that Cornelius, a Roman centurion in Caesarea, was a devout God-fearer. (To fear is to have reverence for, as we know from many Old Testament references to the fear of the Lord.) Non-Jews (Gentiles) who had contact with Jews sometimes became God-fearers, studying the Scriptures and worshiping God without actually converting to Judaism. When Cornelius sends messengers to Peter, they, God-fearers themselves, explain to Peter that Cornelius is a God-fearer. So when Peter shares, he can refer to prophets, knowing these God-fearers have read the prophets.

¹ W. J. Heard, “REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS,” *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 688.

Acts 10: 1-47(NIV)

¹ At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. ² He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. ³ 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!"

⁴ 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. ⁵ Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. ⁶ He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea."

⁷ 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. ⁸ He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.

⁹ About noon the following day as they [the messengers from Cornelius] were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. ¹⁰ He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. ¹¹ He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. ¹² It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. ¹³ Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

¹⁴ "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean."

¹⁵ The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

¹⁶ This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

¹⁷ While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate. ¹⁸ They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there.

¹⁹ While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you. ²⁰ So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them."

²¹ Peter went down and said to the men, "I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come?"

²² The men replied, "We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told

him to ask you to come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say.”²³ Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.

The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the believers from Joppa went along.²⁴ The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends.²⁵ As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence.²⁶ But Peter made him get up. “Stand up,” he said, “I am only a man myself.”

²⁷ While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people.²⁸ He said to them: “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean.²⁹ So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?”

³⁰ Cornelius answered: “Three days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me³¹ and said, ‘Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor.³² Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.’³³ So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.”

³⁴ Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism³⁵ but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.³⁶ You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.³⁷ You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

³⁹ “We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross,⁴⁰ but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen.⁴¹ He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.⁴² He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

[In verses 44-48 the Holy Spirit fell on everyone in Cornelius' household, and Peter, seeing this, had them baptized.]

⁴⁴ While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. ⁴⁵ The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. ⁴⁶ For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.

Then Peter said, ⁴⁷ "Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

OBSERVE (What does the passage say?)

1. Check to see that everyone understands the words in the passage and have several people read it aloud, taking the parts of the narrator, Peter and Cornelius. Then, let people read the text quietly to themselves.

What questions do you have about the text?

2. In what two locations does this story happen? What did Peter see and hear in his vision?
3. What was his first response and the reason for it? (v. 11-16)
4. How often did the vision occur? How did Peter change after he heard the voice?
5. What happened at Cornelius' home?

INTERPRET (What does the passage mean?)

6. What did Peter learn from his experience with Cornelius and his household)?
7. Both Cornelius and Peter received messages from God. What contrasts do you see between how he and Peter responded? What similarities?
8. Put yourself in Peter's mind. Why do you think it took three times for him to realize what God was saying to him?

APPLY (What does the passage mean to me and my community?)

9. Think again of the people with whom you feel uncomfortable whom you listed as a part of last week's Respond step. How do you think God thinks of and feels about this group?

Now fill in the blank (v.15) with an appropriate word which represents your case.

“Do not call () impure that God has made clean.”

RESPOND

This week find someone on your campus who is from a different culture that is unfamiliar to you or even considered as an “enemy” back home—look at the list you made in the last RESPOND step for ideas. Invite them for a meal or coffee and have a time to get to know each other. Pray before and after you meet.

Make the invitation low-key and casual: “I’ve seen you on campus a lot and just wanted to get to know you a bit,” rather than something serious, like “I wanted to have a reconciliation talk with you.” Meeting in a public place like a cafeteria, coffee shop, or restaurant would help with keeping the occasion neutral. If you are considering meeting someone who is the opposite gender from you, make sure that it is not inappropriate. This would be very unusual for Islamic background people, for example.

When you meet, start by sharing about things you have in common (what you study, what made you want to study at this school, etc.). You don’t have to talk about the differences and difficulties between your home cultures / ethnicities. If you do, try to ask honest questions and listen to their stories with an understanding heart rather than making hasty conclusions to support preconceived opinions. We recommend “sandwiching” difficult topics with more casual topics, such as hobbies, majors, or favorite places in town.

If you can’t find anyone, do some short research about one of your neighboring countries. Choose a country that you really don’t know or don’t like. What is the relationship between two countries? Especially, how is history taught differently in each country? How might these worldview differences make sharing God’s Kingdom shalom more difficult?

Memory Verse: Acts 10:34-35 (NIV)

I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.

Write these verses in your heart language here:

Memorize them in your heart language and English this week.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Yasuyuki (Yasu) Kamata was an international student in Chicago, United States where he started to attend church and came to follow Jesus as Lord and Savior. After completing his MA degree in social sciences, he pursued his MDiv at North Park Theological Seminary. During that time, he also served on staff with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, ministering to international students. After graduation, Yasu returned to Japan and has served with Kirisutosha Gakusei Kai (KGK), serving international students studying in Japan and facilitating partnerships with other IFES movements in East Asia. In collaboration with his Korean counterpart Hwakyong, he has facilitated multiple study tours to help fellowship grow among Korean and Japanese Christian students. Yasu lives in Tokyo with his wife and two daughters. He is currently regional team leader for the Kanto (Tokyo) region of the KGK.

Hwakyong Rahat Namkung was a campus minister with InterVarsity Fellowship/Korea. She is a graduate of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Chicago, IL and has partnered with Yasu to facilitate tours enhancing fellowship among Korean and Japanese Christian students.

Art Information: Wesley, Frank, 1923-2002. Peter's Vision, from Art in the Christian Tradition, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN.
<https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=59250> [retrieved September 10, 2024].
Original source: Estate of Frank Wesley, http://www.frankwesleyart.com/main_page.htm.

Facilitator's Notes

Objectives of the Study

- For students to grasp God's desire to bring reconciliation amongst peoples that are in conflict with one another.
- For them to take initial steps in building relationships and understanding people who are distant from them either historically, politically, or culturally.

Notes on the Questions

Question 2: The large sheet contained all kinds of animals, including those that were considered to be "unclean." For a list of "unclean" animals and what Jews were supposed to do with them, refer to Leviticus 11:2-47. Bring in a Bible with a map or find an online map to help people see the locations involved in the text.

Question 6: The coming of the Spirit upon the Gentiles indicated God's acceptance of them as genuine followers of Christ.

Question 8: Cultural beliefs are at the worldview level, normally unquestioned. Prejudices can be, too!