



DEVOTIONAL TIME
12-15-2014 @ 0900
"Realize the Deeper Truth!"
Acts 10:34-38

Join us **Dec. 18** for our
"Christmas Joy '14" Program
In the "Chapel of Hope"
1200—1230

JOYFUL, JOYFUL, WE ADORE YOU!

Joyful, joyful, we adore You, God of Glory, Lord of Light!
Angels soon lift praise before You, singing through that holy Night!
To a manger comes a Baby, Child of Mary, Son of God!
Voices ready joyous chorus, welcoming Your Gift of Love!



Acts 10:34-38

Peter began to speak: "I now realize that it is true that God treats everyone on the same basis. Those who fear Him and do what is right are acceptable to Him, no matter what race they belong to. You know the Message He sent to the People of Israel, proclaiming the Good News of Peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know of the great event that took place throughout the land of Israel, beginning in Galilee after John preached his message of baptism. You know about Jesus of Nazareth, and how God poured out on Him the Holy Spirit and Power. He went everywhere, doing good, and healing all who were under the power of the Devil, for God was with Him."

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Have you ever found yourself "facing facts" you didn't want to accept, simply because they "flew in the face" of your most cherished beliefs?
- Have you ever had to "swallow your pride" when faced with "new data" or "deeper truth" that forced you admit your prior belief was based on limited or faulty understanding?
- What was it like for you to discover how liberating life became in glow of the "new input" that revolutionized your world view as it widened your perspective"?

The words of Peter are true "eye-openers" when we realize he has walked with Christ, witnessed the resurrected Christ, and received the Holy Spirit Christ sent at Pentecost. Peter states, "I now realize that it is true that God treats everyone on the same basis." We are not sure how long it has been since his infilling of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, but we may surmise it has been several weeks to a few months, given all that Luke has presented of the spread of the Church from Jerusalem, through Samaria and Galilee to Damascus in Syria, generally restricted to Jewish believers. Now God "raises the bar", and opens the Gospel to *all* who would believe. Peter needs a few "Divine nudges", but this is where he suddenly "gets it". While it is sad but true that "old programming dies hard", God is so patient with us when we need it most. Change comes hard for us all, especially when it involves an "adjustment" of "religious vision". Whether a given belief is spelled out in the Scripture, learned in a church setting, or sparked by casual comments of a trusted spiritual advisor, it may just as well be "chiseled in stone"! So, when God tries to "re-educate" us, He often has to "storm the gates" of our "religious fortresses" to invite us to taste the freedom of open spaces in His "New Horizon". Not only does God want us to know spiritual liberty...He's inviting us to spread the Message to ALL people of "good will"...whoever they may be...wherever they live...however long the process may take. God, grant us the Grace of Spiritual Renewal! Enlighten our inner vision, so we may see truly, and adapt willingly to the promptings of Your Spirit. Teach us to build "bridges of understanding" rather than "walls of willful narrow-mindedness". Make us a "living Gospel" that melts icy doubt, and cools the flames of rage and vengeance, so we all see Your "image" in the "strangers" to which You send us.



DEVOTIONAL TIME

12-16-2014 @ 0900

*"It's About the Word of God,
Not the One Who Delivers It!"*

Acts 10:44-48

Join us **Dec. 18** for our
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In the "Chapel of Hope"
1200—1230

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Acts 10:44-48

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit came down on all those who were listening to his message. The Jewish believers who had come from Joppa with Peter were amazed that God had poured out His Gift of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speaking in strange tongues, and praising God's greatness! Peter spoke up: "These people have received the Holy Spirit, just as we also did. Can anyone, then, stop them from being baptized with water?" So he ordered them to be baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay with them for a few days.

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Have you ever found yourself amazed to witness how the Grace of God "moved with power" to bless and sanctify someone you had "written off" as "unreachable"?
- Were you ever astonished to notice how God "reached the lost" through a "fractured vessel", (as in a person whose lifestyle and character didn't exactly measure up to "God's Message")?
- Did you ever find it a "wonder" that God might use *you* to invite an individual whose values and lifestyle were "polar opposites" from yours to share "Gospel Life"?

As we consider this story, it's apparent what Peter thinks of this group of Romans, and any "place" they might have in the "family of God". On the one hand, these Romans are "interlopers", the hated conquerors of the Jewish nation; at the same time, Jewish religion declares them "unbelievers" and "unclean", and therefore, totally unfit for the family of God. This is why Peter is so conflicted about God's "directive" in sending him to *these people!* But this is precisely where God's Word shines in power! Not only can It "reach the unreachable", but It will do so through the unlikely and imperfect channel of a reluctant apostle. So it's not about the "passion" or "quality" of the one who delivers the Word, but about the transcendent energy and transformational power of the Word itself. Notice: God moves while Peter is still speaking. God doesn't wait for an altar call, doesn't wait for Peter to ask if they understand, doesn't wait for Peter to ask them to all stand, kneel, lie prostrate, or anything else we might associate with the "proper delivery" of the Gospel Message. God simply enlightens minds and moves hearts at the delivery of His Word...even though Peter is pretty certain they don't deserve it. What about God's Word at work in us? Have we "perceived Promise" in God's Word, but still wonder, "Is that Promise really for me"? God, grant us the Grace to ponder Your Word with open souls, eager hearts, and searching minds. Teach us here that Your Word is for us, regardless of our religious tradition or social situation. Make us eager to receive It, believe It, and cleave to it with ready acceptance, assured You will respond to our hope in It. In Your Kingdom, there is no "us and them"... only *us in union with You!* As You declare us "eligible", may we all receive everything Your Word promises, in the Peace and Joy You pour out for all Your "children" in this "Season of Light"!



DEVOTIONAL TIME
12-17-2014 @ 0900
"Religiosity Resists
the Challenges of Change"
Acts 11:1-4

Join us **TOMORROW** for our
"Christmas Joy '14" Program
In the "Chapel of Hope"
1200—1230

JOYFUL, JOYFUL, WE ADORE YOU

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Acts 11:1-4

The Apostles and the other believers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the Word of God. When Peter went to Jerusalem, those who were in favor of circumcising Gentiles criticized him, saying, "You were a guest in the home of uncircumcised Gentiles, and you even ate with them!" So Peter gave them a complete account of what had happened from the very beginning.

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Have you ever had to write with your other hand, due to a dare, an injury, or some "awareness exercise"? When you tried it, how difficult did you find it? Did it even "feel impossible" at first?
- Have you ever gone through a "pastoral transfer" which involved a complete change of philosophy and preaching style? Was it severe enough to make you leave? If so – why?
- When you invest in a new electronic device or home appliance, how easily do you adjust to the "new features" and "updated functions" that promise to make your life so much "better"/"easier"?

Disagreements inflict conflict, and "religious" disagreements rank among the most severe. In this passage, Peter finds himself in another "obey you...or God?" situation. He has expanded Christian outreach at God's direction, and word of his revolutionary "mission" has polarized the young Church. As he returns to Jerusalem in the wake of a mini-Pentecost at the home of Cornelius, he finds himself at the center of another theological firestorm, but this one blazes within the Church itself! Harshly criticized for daring to defy "customs of cleanliness", he gets no hero's welcome. If Peter expected fellow believers to accept or approve his "outreach to the lost" among the Gentile world, he's gravely mistaken. What he's got is a boatload of trouble! (Have you ever felt this way? After obeying what you understood to be "the Will of God," have you had your project "blow up in your face"? Have you ever felt as though you "really blew it" because many of those you respected and esteemed have opposed your effort to "glorify the Lord" and "bring in a harvest of souls"? Were you tempted to just "chuck the whole project", and go back to "business as usual", stuck in your old routines?) At times, it's really tempting to erect religious "walls of safety" to keep all God's children "in good order", (those who think and act like us, and of course, keep out the "pagan world" and all its dangerous traps.) But is that what Jesus Christ commissioned? Hasn't He called us to "go into all the world", (not "sit safely in our little fellowships", and beg the world to come us!) It's Advent...a Time of Preparation. We are to "prepare" ourselves and our world for the Grace of Christmas, which may "catch us by surprise" in an outpouring of unexpected favor from the One whose Birth we celebrate. If we take this challenge, we are likely to make some people nervous; we may even have to "stand alone" in the effort to "keep Christ in Christmas". God, grant us the Grace of Clear Vision and Steadfast Witness. You sent Your Son to save us all, and every person of "good will" is a "citizen in training" for membership in the Reign He established when He went "all out" for us...in His Birth & Life, Death & Resurrection. Now it's our turn, Lord. When called to account for our "scandalous outreach" to the "desolate & destitute", empower us to witness to Your Love through Your Love, and let the Savior be "born in us anew"!



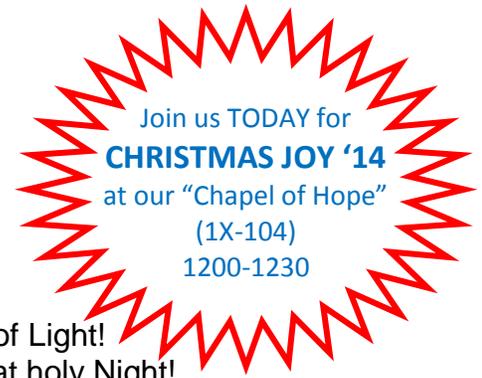
DEVOTIONAL TIME

12-18-2014 @ 0900

"Turn Your 'Bad' into Good!"

Acts 11:19-26

JOYFUL, JOYFUL, WE ADORE YOU



Joyful, joyful, we adore You, God of Glory, Lord of Light!
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Acts 11:19-26

"Some of the believers who were scattered by the persecution which took place when Stephen was killed went as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, telling the Message to Jews only. But other believers, who were from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and proclaimed the Message to Gentiles also, telling them the Good News about the Lord Jesus. ...The news about this reached the Church in Jerusalem, so they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ...Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul. When he found him, he took him to Antioch, and for a whole year, the two met with the people of the Church, and taught a large group. It was at Antioch that the believers were first called 'Christians'."

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Can you remember situations in your life when nothing went "according to plan"? Did you let the "unexpected" developments derail you, or did you find a new way to "keep life on track"?
- Have you known people who could always seem to "find the bright side" of every event, even the "crisis situations" that would have totally terrified you? Did you wonder how they did it?
- Did you ever find yourself in a "new location", uncertain of your future, but full of faith that it would all come together? Did you detect "God's Hand" in that development?

If there is one thing we know for sure, it is that "life will happen", and quite often NOT in the way we planned, expected, or even hoped. Notice how "the believers were scattered" by the persecution which took place when Stephen was killed. Their "scattering" was nothing they planned. They never expected to become "people of travel". (Were they waiting for Jesus to return to Mt. Olivet?) In any case, they made the best of a "bad situation", and continued to spread the Good News. If you have been "following the action" as we have gone along, you will remember that they are facing vicious foes who persecute them most harshly. Things in life have gone from "bad" to "worse" to "hellishly horrid" very quickly, but what they do with it is marvelous, even inspirational! Trusting that God has promised to be with them always... in every situation... in every location, they use their new situation to testify to the goodness of the One they love. To His Glory, they will witness, whether times are "good and right" or "bad and wrong". One big mistake lies in assuming that once we become "believers", life will be a "cake walk" of delight and ease; everything will turn out to go our way all the time, and in every situation. Yet the Word of God shows a "life of challenge and growth", in which we will need to turn to God in crisis after crisis. But, no matter where we go, God is already there, with us, to work out every facet of life to our good, whether it goes as we planned it or not. In fact, it may not "work out" at all, but when God has His way with it, the situation will resolve in a better fashion than we could ever imagine, "working out" for our good. God, grant us the Grace of Total Trust. In the face of the "unexpected", keep us willing to learn something, meet someone, go somewhere, or become someone You equip to meet some "unplanned" event or "crisis" situation down the road. Teach us to turn to You in every situation, however challenging it may appear, assured You are ready to turn it into something good. Help us understand that You are God... in the midst of it all. Keep us preparing our hearts and minds to receive Your Grace and perceive Your Presence in ALL of life.



DEVOTIONAL TIME

12-19-2014 @ 0900

**“When the Going Gets Tough,
The Tough Get Going!”**

Acts 11:27-30



JOYFUL, JOYFUL, WE ADORE YOU

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Acts 11:27-30

“About that time, some prophets went from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them, named Agabus, stood up, and by the power of the Spirit, predicted that a severe famine was about to come over all the earth. (It came when Claudius was emperor.) The disciples decided that they each would send as much as they could to help their fellow believers who lived in Judea. They did this, then, and sent the money to the Church Elders by Barnabas and Saul.”

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Can you remember a time you thought things couldn't get any worse, only to discover that they most certainly could...and did so “quick, fast, and in a warp-drive hurry”?
- How did you cope with such “crisis” moments? How did you live with their “disastrous” effects? Did you “cave in” or “grow up”? What happened to your “faith” and “trust”?
- Have you ever witnessed someone endure a very tough time, coping calmly with a massive challenge, inspiring all around them with “can-do” attitude and gracious style?

Our journey through the Book of Acts now shows us something of “Christian character” we would rather not have to learn. “Tough times” do arise in the life of believers, often proceeding from “tough” to “brutally nasty” in the wink of an eye. Have you ever found yourself facing a terrifying prospect, and wondering if God had “gone on vacation”? Have you ever wondered if you had said or done something to “create a rift” between you and God, because everything in life suddenly seemed to go completely “cattywampus” in your situation? Imagine how these early Christian believers must have felt. Jesus Christ has brought them a New Teaching, the Good News, ratified a New Covenant in His Blood, and has given them New Power by the infilling of the Holy Spirit. They're spreading His Word with “signs following”, and then “Wham!”—vicious persecution has “turned their world upside down”, God has sent them to pagan strangers with the Gospel, and now a looming famine tops the list of unlikely and unwelcome developments. But what do they do when everything goes “cattywampus” like this...whine, cry, or complain? NO! Since they *know* they are God's children, and are *sure* God has promised to meet their every need according to the “riches of Heaven”, they move forward with what they have and begin to share it. Note the phrase: “The disciples decided”; see how they chose the “Way of Trust” in a “tough time”, and committed themselves to “charity” for fellow believers. When the going got tough, they got going! Now we are drawing down our “Season of Preparation”. It's almost Christmas. Are we ready to celebrate the awesome Love of our Heavenly Father, shown in the wondrous Gift of His Beloved Son? God, grant us the Grace of Steadfast Trust! Give us vision beyond our resources, so we reach out in care to those whose need is greater than ours. Infuse our hearts with the generous spirit that marked the life and ministry of Your Son. Let the Mystery of Christmas light our minds with Your Wisdom and warm our spirits with Your Grace. Make us more like Jesus, Your Son and our Brother. From the Stable of Bethlehem to the Cross of Calvary, He went “all out” for us. Now empower us to go “all in” for Him, even in the toughest of times!