

The Sermon Manuscript of  
When the Walls Fall Down  
From Acts 11:1-18  
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Acts 11:1-18  
When the Walls Fall Down

There's one practice Christians have been perfecting since before we were even called Christians.

It's not communion.

It's not baptism.

***It's arguing.***

From the Gospels to the early church, the disciples argue—especially when they're anxious or facing change. Twice in Luke, Jesus has to break up arguments over who is the greatest. And both times? Ministry transitions. First, after giving the disciples authority to heal. Second, just before Jesus' arrest.

When the future feels uncertain, we grasp for control. And often, we argue. Especially when the *walls* we've built around identity or security feel like they're beginning to tremble.

In Acts 11, we find another wall beginning to fall.

Peter returns to Jerusalem after visiting the Gentile cities of Joppa and Caesarea, and the Jewish believers confront him. "Why did you go to them? Why did you eat with them?" This wasn't just table manners. These were people their law and culture had taught them to avoid. Their way of life, their identity as a people, had long been tied to religious codes—dietary laws, purity rituals, boundaries of belonging.

To break those codes felt like betraying God.

But Peter tells them a story—his story—of what happens when walls fall down. [There is a power of telling your story of what God did and when God did it that no one can deny. Here Peter tells his story.]

While staying with Simon the tanner, Peter has a vision. A sheet comes down from heaven, filled with all kinds of animals, many forbidden by the Law. A voice says, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat." Peter refuses. Three times this happens. And the voice replies, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane."

Before he can make sense of it, three men arrive, sent by Cornelius, a Gentile who feared God, gave generously, and prayed constantly. Peter goes. And when he meets Cornelius and hears his story, the meaning of the vision begins to unfold. The wall between Jew and Gentile, clean and unclean, insider and outsider, is crumbling.

Peter preaches. And the Spirit falls. The Gentiles speak in tongues, just like at Pentecost. Peter says, "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?"

No one can. The Gentiles are baptized. And the church changes.

Peter isn't dismissing tradition. He's witnessing its expansion. The Law had always been a gift—a root system grounding the people in God. But roots don't form walls. They grow. They reach outward.

That's what happens when walls fall down.

So here is the question Acts 11 still asks us today: Who would surprise you at God's table? Who have we kept on the outside of God's grace?

Immigrants? LGBTQ+ siblings? People from other political tribes? The unhoused? The addicted? The forgotten?

If we let the Spirit speak, we may hear the same words Peter did: *"What God has made clean, you must not call unclean."* Because the Spirit is still falling. The table is still growing. And Christ is still building a Body that breaks down every wall.

#### AFFIRMATION OF FAITH *(from the Confession of 1967, inclusive language)*

We believe that the life, death, resurrection, and promised coming of Jesus Christ set the pattern for the church's mission.

His life involves the church in the common life of all people.

His service calls the church to serve others for every form of human well-being.

His suffering makes the church sensitive to all human suffering.

His crucifixion reveals God's judgment against injustice—and the consequences of the church's own complicity.

Yet in the power of the risen Christ and the hope of his return, we see the promise of God's renewal and victory over all wrong.

The church follows this pattern in its life and action.

To live and serve in this way is to confess Christ as Lord.