Joint Diaconate and Session Meeting
August 30, 2015

Opening Unison Prayer:

Everlasting God, in whom we live and move and have our being: You have made us for yourself, so that our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you. Give us purity of heart and strength of purpose, that no selfish passion may hinder us from knowing your will, no weakness keep us from doing it; that in your light we may see clearly, and in your service find perfect freedom.

We pray for your holy catholic church. Fill it with all truth in all peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where in any thing it is amiss, reform it. Where it is right, strengthen it; where it is in want, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it; for we offer our prayer in the strong name of Jesus Christ your Son and our Savior. Amen.

Scripture Reading:

Acts 10:9-16

About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. Then he heard a voice saying, *"Get up, Peter; kill and eat."* But Peter said, *"By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean."* The voice said to him again, a second time, *"What God has made clean, you must not call profane."* This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven.

Galatians 3:27-28

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

Context:

Acts 10
Peter has been healing the sick and even a dead person. He is approaching the city of Joppa and goes up on the roof to pray. God gives him a vision that is contradictory to his understanding of the Old Testament law. He is to kill and eat unclean animals. Peter will not do so, for he knows it goes against God's commands. Yet God gives him permission to do so and then after three occurrences the vision stops. During all of this, Cornelius, a Gentile centurion is called by an angel of the Lord to send for Peter to come to his house. After this vision, Cornelius' servants come to Peter's home and explain what is going on and for Peter to visit Cornelius in Caesarea. Peter realizes, *"I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him."* (Acts 10:34)

Galatians 3
Paul is frustrated that there are Jewish Christians who are still either excluding Gentile Christians, or requiring them to be Jewish in order to be Christian. This means that they have to be circumcised, follow the dietary laws, etc… He makes a point that all who are baptized are ONE and isn't elevated above one another; thus – Jew over Gentile; male over female; free over slave.

Break up into small groups of 4 *(2 elders and 2 deacons)*

In your small group:

1. God gives Peter a vision that seems radically different from his understanding and upbringing in his faith. What is God trying to communicate to him? Suppose you were Peter, how would you feel about this?

2. In your own understanding of the Scriptures, what are the differences between Jews and Gentiles? Is this the first instance in Scripture where the thought of Gentile inclusion is mentioned?

3. Paul says, "There is no longer Jew nor Greek." What do you think Paul is communicating in our Galatians passage about our connection with one another in Christ?

4. Many who feel that God is doing something new during our time reference these passages to explain why gay marriage is okay. Based on your reading of the texts, do you feel that these texts lead us to the same conclusion? Why or why not?

5. Close your group time in prayer together.