

It's Okay to Change Your Mind: Acts 11:1-18

Norwalk Christian Church, May 19, 2019,, Year C, Eastertide 5, Lectionary

Play 4:30 minute TED talk clip. Then scripture reading.

Finish this sentence in your mind...I used to believe _____, but I changed my mind.

Think about it for a moment.

Your story may not be as dramatic as the one we just heard--Megan Phelps-Roper, who left her family church, Westboro Baptist Church, Peter's story from Acts. But you have a story. We've all changed our minds.

On Wednesday morning before school, Finn, Oliver, and I went to Daylight Donuts. It was Ollie's first time. And he decided to get the strawberry milk with his donut. He never had strawberry milk before. It used to be my favorite, back when I didn't think about things such as sugars and calories. Ollie ordered it. It was pretty. It looked yummy. Then he tasted it, and never touched it again. "Ollie," I said, "why aren't you drinking your strawberry milk?" Ollie replied, "I don't like it." "Then why did you order it." And Ollie said, "I never tried it before! But I did now, and I don't like it."

I refused to throw it away. I put it in the refrigerator. It wasn't cheap. Fast-forward two days: Ollie: "Daddy, can I have my strawberry milk?" "But I thought you didn't like it." "I do now, Daddy!" And he chugged it. He had changed his mind.

We all change our minds. Maybe not as quickly as Oliver...but we change our minds.

Food preferences. Styles. Color choices. Brand preference. Those are surface things. But what about our views and beliefs? Political, religious, social? Our prejudices. Can we change our behaviors and habits?

If you've ever gotten into a Facebook argument in the comments section, you know how hard it is to change someone's beliefs. But it's possible. We've seen it happen in ourselves. We've seen it happen in others. But it rarely happens because of an argument or because someone provides a list of facts that force us to change our mind.

Often, it's more gradual. And often our mind changes are rooted in personal experience.

Megan changed her views on because she got to know people she hated,, saw their compassion, heard their stories, and she had to change in response.

That's Peter's story this morning. He used to believe that Gentiles were the Unclean and out of favor with God. That God cared most that he eat clean foods, was ritually pure, and never--ever--ate with unclean people. But God showed up in a dream. But more than that--God showed up as a person—Cornelius, the man not named in this retelling of the events that happened to Peter one chapter before in Acts 10.

Cornelius wasn't just a Gentile, he was a Roman Centurion who oversaw the occupation of Palestinian lands. In every understanding of the Jewish faith, Cornelius was Unclean. He wasn't favored by God. And the Holy Spirit, which Peter witnessed moving on Pentecost, the Holy Spirit that filled the Apostles, that came upon the newly baptized believers, that changed lives, that filled the church--that same Holy Spirit was moving in Cornelius and his family.

In other words, God was where God was not supposed to be! God was doing things God was not supposed to do. And seeing that movement of God, Peter had no choice than to change his mind. His beliefs--his theology--had to catch up with his personal experience of God working in the world.

That's how it happens--not in the Facebook comments. Not from arguments from the pulpit. I've been in ministry in some way for the last 20 years--and I've yet to see anyone argue someone into a new belief--and I came from a tradition that loved to argue.

But people's beliefs changed--their minds changed--when they experienced Christ in new ways and new places. They saw the Spirit moving, and their minds had to change to catch up.

Where do you see the Spirit moving today? Where is God pushing you? How is God calling you to change your mind?

Who, in your experience, is on the outs with God, outside of God's love--can you see the Spirit blowing in their direction?

I used to believe that religion was rigid. That faith was static. That the goal of the Christian life was to reclaim something that was lost, hold onto the ancient faith.

But now...now I believe our faith is an active, dynamic faith. Now, I believe our God is on the move. Read through scripture--read through the book of Acts, in particular--and you see a God on the move. The Holy Spirit, arriving in new places with new people, pushing the boundaries of what the religious believed. And don't ever say, God can't love those people. God can't show up there.

Chances are, that will be the next place God moves.

I have good news for you today: It's okay to change your mind. In fact, it would seem changing your mind is what the Gospel of Christ is all about.

God is on the move. We can deny it and argue against it, but that won't stop God. As Peter said to those who questioned his change of mind, "Who are we to hinder God."

Peter's story isn't just about the conversion of the first Gentile to their new Christian faith. It's also the story of his own conversion, about how God opened his eyes to see that God's love was bigger than he could ever imagine.

In that moment, Peter realized God's Good News. That life is better--more joy-filled, more Spirit-filled--when we lay down our presumptions and prejudices about who God is and who God loves, and we embrace the dynamic love of God, wherever it blows.

Can you feel God's Spirit moving. Can you feel God changing your mind.

It's okay, you know. Changing minds--that's what God does best.