

**MINNESOTA VALLEY CHURCH; May 18, 2025**  
**Fifth Sunday of Easter; Singers: Fuglebergs**

**PRELUDE:** Carol Gustafson

**CALL TO WORSHIP:** From Psalm 148

**PASTOR:** Praise the LORD from the earth,

**ALL:** You great sea creatures and all ocean depths,

**PASTOR:** Lightning and hail, snow and clouds,

**ALL:** Stormy winds that do his bidding,

**PASTOR:** You mountains and all hills,

**ALL:** Fruit trees and all cedars,

**PASTOR:** Wild animals and all cattle,

**ALL:** Small creatures and flying birds,

**PASTOR:** Kings of the earth and all nations,

**ALL:** You princes and all rulers on earth,

**PASTOR:** Young men and maidens,

**ALL:** Old men and children.

**PASTOR:** Let them praise the name of the LORD,

**ALL:** For his name alone is exalted;

his splendor is above the earth and the heavens.

**HYMN #171 "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty"**

**CONFESSION OF SIN:** *Almighty God, our Maker and Redeemer, we poor sinners confess to You that we are by nature sinful and unclean, and that we have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed. Therefore we flee for refuge to Your infinite mercy and ask You for Christ's sake, grant us forgiveness of all our sins, and by Your Holy Spirit increase in us true knowledge of You and of Your will and true obedience to Your Word, to the end that by Your grace we may come to eternal life, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*

**CHILDREN'S MESSAGE:**

**READER: Joel Carrizales**

**NEW TESTAMENT LESSON:** *Revelation 21:1-8 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." 5 He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." 6 He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. 7 He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. 8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars-their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."*

**GOSPEL LESSON:** *John 14:23-31 Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. 24 He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. 25 "All this I have spoken while still with you. 26 But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. 27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. 28 "You heard me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you.' If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. 29 I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe. 30*

*I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me, 31 but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me. "Come now; let us leave.*

**READER: Here ends the reading of God's Word.**

**CONGREGATION SINGS: God be praised, for His glad Tidings!**

**CONFESSION OF FAITH:** I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ, His only son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit; born of the virgin Mary; Suffered under Pontius Pilate; Was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell; The third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven; And is seated on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From where He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit; The holy Christian Church; the Communion of Saints; the Forgiveness of sins; The Resurrection of the body, And the Life everlasting. Amen

**GLORIA PATRI:** *Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is not, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen, Amen.*

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS & PRAYER**

**Worship Songs: Chosen by Carol**

**SERMON: "BLESSINGS" ACTS 11:1-18, Pastor Tom Olson, 5/18/25** *Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen*

**ANGLES:** We can look at a scripture text from different angles. I was looking at this text from the angle of DIFFICULTY IN THE EARLY CHURCH. Becky Kruse offered to sing the song "Blessings" and I began to wonder if I could look at this same text through the lens of "BLESSINGS IN THE EARLY CHURCH,"

and I could. And I began to realize that this is a story of our lives...the HARD TIMES OF LIFE can be seen as TROUBLE from the devil to hurt us or BLESSINGS from God to sanctify us.

**SUFFERING:** One young man who has suffered great anguish in his life, recently told me that he has discovered that all pain and troubles are useful because they are able to make him closer to God.

**PARADIGM:** Let's look at a stressful situation in the early church that caused Peter to be severely stretched and harshly criticized and see the BLESSINGS in it. Acts 11:1-18...

## **I. BLESSING ONE: GENTILES BELIEVE IN JESUS**

*Acts 11:1-3 The apostles and the brothers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. 2 So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him 3 and said, "You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them."*

**SURPRISE:** Something surprising happened. It was so shocking that the early Christian church was in an uproar. The amazing thing that happened was that Gentiles became believers in Christ. They received the Holy Spirit. Nobody in the church expected this. They never imagined that a non-Jew would ever or could even become a child of God.

**CRITICISM:** Circumcised Jewish Christians were criticizing Peter because he went to a Gentile home and shared the gospel and, horror of horrors, even ate with them. This was unheard of for Orthodox Jews or Jewish Christians to do such a thing. Jews wanted nothing to do with Gentiles. They called them dogs.

**BLESSING:** The Gentiles were clearly saved. It is a blessing for us who are not a part of the nation of Israel to be able to be saved.

It would be a sad thing for us if only Jews could become Christians and go to heaven.

TODAY: Today mostly non-Jews are being saved. Small numbers of Jews become believers in Christ. They are called Messianic Jews. Some call themselves “completed Jews.”

LIGHT: The salvation of the Gentiles should not have been a shock to Jews since the Old Testament clearly states that Israel is to be a light for the Gentiles. ***Isaiah 49:6 "...I will also make you a LIGHT FOR THE GENTILES, that YOU MAY BRING my salvation to the ENDS of the earth."***

US: Isn't it possible for us to feel no one outside the church will get saved? We look out at the secular culture around us and say, *"The world is mad. People are bent on sin and evil. Our politicians are corrupt. They won't get saved. We just need to circle our wagons, take care of our own souls and hang on until Jesus comes back for us. No one I know wants to be saved."* It is so easy to give up on lost souls, but WE MUST NOT.

PAUL: Look at the Apostle Paul...he would be considered a terrorist today hunting down Christians and throwing them in prison. God saved him and made him a mighty soul winner.

PRAETORIAN GUARDS: Paul ended up incarcerated in Rome. While locked up he won Praetorian guards to Christ. Here is what one source says about it: ***"Yes, there's historical evidence and biblical accounts suggesting that members of the Praetorian Guard, the Roman Emperor's elite bodyguards, became believers in Jesus Christ. Paul's imprisonment and subsequent witnessing, even while under house arrest, influenced many in Caesar's household, including the Praetorian Guard."***

PRAY: That would be like winning the secret service that guards the atheist Communist Chinese President to Christ. We should start our soul winning by putting the most hopeless names on our

prayer list. We pray for their salvation and seek to share the gospel with them.

PETER: Peter was the one who brought this amazing news of Gentiles becoming Christians back to the Jewish Christian church. But at first, even Peter resisted Gentiles becoming believers. What will God need to do to get us to witness to our lost neighbors? God had to use supernatural methods to convince Peter to witness to the Gentiles. This leads us to the second blessing we learn here in Acts 11...

## II. BLESSING TWO: A VISION THAT DIRECTED PETER

***Acts 11:4-14 Peter began and explained everything to them precisely as it had happened: 5 "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance, I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. 6 I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles, and birds of the air. 7 Then I heard a voice telling me, 'Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.' 8 'I replied, 'Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' 9 'The voice spoke from heaven a second time, 'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.' 10 This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again. 11 'Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. 12 The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man's house. 13 He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, 'Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. 14 He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.'***

DREAMS: Do you remember your dreams? I seldom do. God did something amazing to help Peter. He gave him a vision he could not forget. God used this vision to show Peter that he could go into a Gentile home, share the gospel and eat with them.

**TIMING:** At that very moment a delegation from the Gentile home, sent by an angel, came for Peter seeking him so he could tell them how to be saved.

**NEED:** Often I see people and my heart breaks and I cry out to God and say, “How can I reach them with the gospel?” I see children, I see joggers and bikers, I see people in cars at stop lights, I see people at the stores and I pray that somehow, we could do more to share the gospel with these people. I grieve about how many of them are unsaved.

**VISION:** I pray for a vision to show me what I should be doing to get the gospel out to the people around us. I want to do something. We are getting 500 cards inviting people to church. It will be a tool. We should be passing out 5,000!

**LIST:** I am convinced that the Billy Graham evangelistic organization is right when they say it starts by making a list of lost souls and praying for them. I have my list on my desk and I am believing God that my prayers will help the souls on my list get an opportunity to hear about Jesus.

**GOAL:** When people come here, we try to make the Gospel of Grace as clear as possible. We give them opportunity to pray to receive Jesus as Savior and Lord.

**ADMISSION:** I have to admit I don’t do enough to reach lost souls. My friend, Pastor Jim Johnson, now serving in Mora, Minnesota, was called to be the pastor of a church in California several years ago. I asked him what he did to reach people. He told me that he and his family members went out knocking on doors and talking to people. He said that he visited over 1,000 homes. I will never forget that. I want to do more. Another California pastor I knew, who has now passed away, Orville Hiepler, also visited over 1,000 homes. When Rev. Bill Bohline started Hosanna Lutheran Church he visited over 1,000 homes. I

recently heard him say that it was not easy for him to knock on doors, but he forced himself to do it and God blessed the effort.

**ACTION:** Peter GOT A VISION to help motivate him to go to lost Gentiles with the gospel. The Gentiles were ready and waiting for him to come. God said go and Peter went! I hope we as a church can get a real vision from God for lost souls. Finally...

### **III. BLESSING THREE: WE GET TO JOIN GOD’S FAMILY**

*Acts 11:15-18 "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. 16 Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' 17 So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?" 18 When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life."*

**ENLIGHTENMENT:** This is the third blessing. The leaders of the Christian church had to admit that God had opened the door to Gentiles coming to Christ for salvation. The proof was that the Holy Spirit had come upon them. Not only was the light of Christ coming to Gentiles. But light was coming to the Jewish Christian church leaders that God wanted them to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles. It should have been obvious from the words of Jesus to them:

*Matthew 28:19 Jesus said... “go and make disciples of ALL NATIONS...” Acts 1:7 ...you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ENDS OF THE EARTH."*

**COMMISSION:** Jesus wanted them to bring the gospel to every nation on earth. But they were so narrow-minded that they could

not receive accept the simple command of Christ. Now, they got it...ANYONE WHO REPENTS AND BELIEVES IN CHRIST WILL BE SAVED.

ALL: It doesn't matter what nationality they are. God wants souls from every corner of the earth in his Heavenly home. God wants us to find them and bring the gospel to them. God wants us to have the joy of participating in the salvation of the world. People from every nation on earth are being asked to become a part of the family of God.

SOLUTION: Right now there is a terrible crisis in the middle east. There is a bloody war between the Israelis and Palestinians. Iran is on the verge of having a nuclear bomb that they want to use to wipe Israel off the map. Our leaders in America are trying to decide what to do about it. They don't have answers. But there is an answer, it is Jesus the Savior and Lord.

PEACE: Israel is predominantly secular, and Palestinians predominantly Muslim. Both sides need to find peace with God through Jesus Christ. He is the Prince of Peace. He is the road to peace. He is the source of peace. They don't need more weapons, but they need the gospel.

“JOSEPH” Mosab Hassan Yousef, the son of the Hamas terrorist group founder has met Jesus and he wants a peaceful solution to the Palestinian and Israeli conflict. Jesus totally changed his heart from terrorist to peace maker.

APPLICATION: Are you in a war? Are you at odds with a relative or spouse or neighbor or co-worker? The answer is not more lethal weapons...the answer is the Word of God. Jesus brings peace. Where there is hatred, He brings love, where there is sin, He brings forgiveness. Where there is fear, He brings faith.

ONE: Jesus saved the Gentiles and the Jewish Christians learned to rejoice in the development. The two divisions became one body in Christ. Jesus can bring peace to your life too, if you invite Him in.

MEAL: There are very few things more intimate than a nice meal with someone. Jesus wants to dine with you. ***Revelation 3:20*** ***“Behold, I stand and the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come into him and dine with him and he with me.”***

INVITATION: If you have never repented of your sin and received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, I urge you to do so today. If you know Jesus, I encourage you to pray for lost souls and share the gospel with them. If you don't, who will?

GLORY: Hopelessly lost and undesirable souls can be gloriously saved by Jesus. This was a painful and contentious lesson for Peter and the early church, but it led to blessings and joy. *Now may the peace of God that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen*

**SOLO: “Blessings” Becky Kruse accompanied by Vicky Boswell.**

**LORD’S PRAYER:** *Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those WHO trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, The power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen*

**BENEDICTION**

**CLOSING SONG: Chosen by Carol.**

**POSTLUDE: Carol Gustafson**