

## God does not show favoritism

### Acts 10:34-38

**<sup>34</sup> Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism <sup>35</sup> but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. <sup>36</sup> You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. <sup>37</sup> You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached— <sup>38</sup> how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We’ve already reached the middle part of January, 2014. What kind of a year will 2014 be for each of us and for our church? Only God knows what lies before us, but I pray that each of you and our congregation, Aganai Evangelical Lutheran Church, have a very blessed year. The theme of our sermon today is, “God does not show favoritism.” Let’s take a moment to think about what this really means that God does not show favoritism. Can we say the same thing about ourselves? Because we are sinful human beings, we have our likes and dislikes. Sometimes we avoid and shun people who are different from us. This is not only true of adults, but we can see it in children too. Nobody taught them to do this, but little children will choose the things they like and reject the things they don’t like. If someone has a different opinion than them, they might make fun of them, not include them in their circles, or ignore them. Even among Christians there is a tendency to treat others this way. But our God does not show favoritism.

In Acts chapter 10, we hear about a Gentile named Cornelius. God sent the Holy Spirit to him and his family and some of his friends. Cornelius was a centurion in the Roman army. In the first century, the people of Israel were under the rule of the Roman Empire. In a legion of the Roman army, there were 6000 soldiers. The Roman Empire had many legions of soldiers stationed in the land of Israel. God sent an angel to the centurion Cornelius and told him to invite one of Jesus’ disciples, Peter, to his house. Up until this time, the people of Israel had considered the people of other nations to be unclean, outsiders, and people who didn’t know God. The Israelites shunned the Gentiles. But in verse 28, Peter says, **“You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean.”** God revealed these things to Peter in a dream, and Peter accepted Cornelius’ invitation to his house. God was opening the door for the Gentiles to believe. In the prophet Hosea, it says, **“I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called ‘Not my loved one.’ I will say to those called ‘Not my people,’ ‘You are my people’; and they will say, ‘You are my God.’”** (Hosea 2:23). From this time on there would be no distinction between Jew and Gentile. All people who have true faith in the Lord Jesus are brought into the fellowship of the Christian church and have equal status.

Up until this time Peter thought that God’s grace was limited only to the people of Israel. But now he knew that God was interested in the salvation of all people and that He would show no favoritism among people who truly believed in Him.

**<sup>35</sup> But (God) accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.**

The message of salvation was sent first of all to the Jews, but Jesus Christ is the Savior of all people. In this way there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile. As Peter explains in verse 37, Cornelius

and his family and his friends had heard about the things that Jesus had done: <sup>37</sup> **You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—**

We also have heard about Jesus and the things He has done. We are able to worship Jesus here today because God doesn't distinguish between the Jewish people and us. If God only loved the Jewish people, Gentile people like us would not have received God's salvation. If that were the case, we would still be in our sins and we would have no hope. But thanks be to God, God who does not show favoritism has declared His love for us too. God sent His son to die on the cross for the sins of all people and God raised Him to life on the third day even for Gentiles like you and me. In this way Jesus took away the eternal punishment which we deserved and made us God's holy people. Jesus has made peace between us and God.

Because God does not show favoritism but has loved and saved us too, how can we show our thanks to Him? We can do that by not showing favoritism towards our neighbor but by loving our neighbor as ourself. We also show our thanks by loving God with all of our heart. God also encourages us to love our neighbor as ourself. In Luke chapter 10, Jesus tells us the parable of the Good Samaritan and teaches us to love all people without favoritism. (The Jewish people and the Samaritan people got along like cats and dogs.)

<sup>30</sup> **In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup> A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. <sup>34</sup> He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'**

We also feel that it is difficult to love our enemy. Some of us might also say that it is impossible to love people who have not treated us well or people that we do not like. But at the end of the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus says to us,

**"Go and do likewise."** Every day we commit many sins against God, more than we can count. In our selfish lives, we often forget about God and insult Him. But God has been merciful to such sinners like us. He loves us. Because God does not show favoritism and because He has shown love to us, we are able to show love to our neighbor without showing favoritism. We can do this even towards people whose way of thinking and opinions are different than ours. We can show love also to people from other countries.

Let's listen once again to what Peter said: **"I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism <sup>35</sup> but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.** In 2014, let's fear and love God. Let's live just and holy lives before Him. As servants who want to please their lord, let's faithfully live lives as believers. Let's not show discrimination against people, but let's walk through life with the Lord Jesus, remembering the love of God who does not show favoritism. Amen.