

A resurrected Christ means radical change. Just ask Peter. He's stunned, shaken, shocked. Nothing could have prepared him for this encounter with Cornelius. He was to eat food he had never eaten before. He was to eat with people he had avoided his whole life. Drastic changes were in store for this famous apostle.

Here's the scene: Peter is praying on a rooftop. God comes to him in a vision. Three times He tells Peter to eat certain types of animals that a good Jew would never let cross his taste buds. These were foods that had been forbidden for religious reasons. It was going against his whole spiritual upbringing to eat them. They turned his stomach, made him gag, because they were so associated with what he thought God didn't want him to eat.

Is he shocked? Stunned? Shaken? He has to be. Peter's response isn't surprising: "Surely not, Lord!" But God says that He has made these foods clean, and Peter is to eat them.

But for Peter it was even more than just strange foods. God also tells him to eat with a Gentile family. Once again, for religious reasons, Jews just didn't enter a Gentile's house. It would make them unclean, unacceptable to God. Peter had grown up avoiding non-Jews, being careful not to touch them or their belongings. Could **you** sit down and eat with someone who had the plague, a disease that you could catch just from being in the same room as that person? It would be tough. That's close to what it must have felt like for Peter. He's shaken. He's stunned. He's shocked.

But Peter does just what he's told to do. He eats with this Gentile Cornelius and his family. He eats food he's never eaten before. Everything's changed. Radical changes are in the air. Why? Because Jesus has risen from the dead. A resurrected Christ means radical change.

A resurrected Christ changes our world, too! He wants to bring together people who just aren't usually seen together. He wants people who so often avoid each other to eat at the same table. For many, this will be shocking. The radical changes leave many stunned and shaken.

Think about it. We live in a world where people notice differences. If you dress one way, you belong to a certain group and not others. Those who wear black leather and are decked out in tattoos don't hang around much with elderly widows. Those who drink fancy coffees and eat goat cheese on their sun-dried bagels don't travel much in the same circles as those who like their meat and potatoes.

Some people say that culture wars are what are going on in our world. The political left does battle against the right. The goal is to win, not to cooperate to produce a better government. Others talk about generation wars. Aging baby boomers and Gen Xers hold jobs and positions that younger folks want. Who stays and who gets pushed out? Tension is high. And we've always suffered from ethnic battles. Immigration into the United States makes American-born citizens nervous. Precious resources and dollars are going for people who didn't make this country what it is. It seems they just came to reap the benefits. Racial problems still abound. A different color skin often separates. Suspicion and fear are more common than the dreams and ideals of the civil rights movement. The melting pot is a myth. We live in a country where differences exclude people, where belonging is not easy, where sitting down to eat together as friends and family is mighty scarce.

But in the church, we are to be different. We *include*, not *exclude*. We join together, not separate. We fellowship, not divide. And that can be shocking. It can stun and shake the way things are in a church. Yet that is the way Jesus does things. He makes radical changes because He's the resurrected Christ. Just look at what changed for Peter.

Even though in shock he still went to Cornelius' house and spoke amazing words. He starts by announcing that God accepts all people. No favorites. No partiality. You can be any ethnic background, any race, male or female, young or old, rich or poor. It makes no difference to God. He simply welcomes everyone. Everyone who believes in Jesus and receives forgiveness of sins through this resurrected Savior belongs to God's church. That's amazing. To be accepted by God even though we are sinful, to belong to His church even though we have failed Him, is amazing, simply amazing.

What's more, even though he is stunned, Peter goes and speaks unbelievable words to Cornelius' family and friends. The message is simple, but powerful. It goes like this: Jesus is Lord of all. He did so much good and healed many during His life. He was anointed by God's Spirit to rescue people from the power of Satan. But He was killed. He was hung on a tree to die. But God raised Him from the dead. Easter resurrection! Easter joy! The grave could not hold Him. Death would not be victorious. Jesus won that battle for us. Everything that could keep us from God was defeated that day. Everything that was needed for us to belong to God forever was won that day. Unbelievable, simply unbelievable.

And more. Even though Peter is shaken, he eats with this family and shares awesome news with them. Jesus has appeared many times in those

weeks after His resurrection. Peter himself sat down on a seashore and ate fish with Him. No tricks. No illusions. Just the Lord of life back to life giving life. Jesus is the One who welcomes us to His table to eat with Him. Jesus is the One who will bring us home when we die. Jesus is the One whom God has appointed to judge us on the Last Day. What awesome news. Those who eat with Jesus are forgiven, accepted, raised to new life, promised eternal life. Awesome, simply awesome!

Yes, all this is amazing, unbelievable and awesome for Peter, and for us! Just look at the radical changes a resurrected Jesus brings to our lives.

Instead of rejection by the Almighty Father, we are accepted, forgiven by this Jesus who is risen from the dead. Instead of a cold grave, we are given life eternal, victory over death. Instead of being left out, we eat with Jesus, receive His very body and blood every time we go to His table to receive Communion. And, yes, because of a resurrected Christ we even include, welcome, and join together at the Lord's Supper with those who look different, dress different, and act differently than us.

That's the way the resurrected Jesus works. He brings life, where there was once death, acceptance where there was once rejection, welcome where there was once exclusion. Yes, a resurrected Christ brings radical change- for Peter and for us.

Amazing! Unbelievable! Awesome! That's what Easter is all about. Today the hymns are sung with joy and emotion. The Choir, the Brass Instruments, flowers, and banners all proclaim the wonderful news of Jesus' victory over the grave. Attendance is high. Clothes are special. The Easter holiday is celebrated anew. Why? Because the resurrected Christ has brought radical changes to our lives.

He changes people who are shocked, stunned, and shaken into those who see Him as Someone who has done amazing, unbelievable, and awesome things for His people. Amen.