

## **Bold Prayers: Foreigner** by Pastor Kurt Hoover

### **Bold Litany adapted from Psalm 138**

**Leader:** I will praise you, Lord, with all my heart;

**All: before the “gods” I will sing your praise.**

**Leader:** I will bow down toward your holy temple and will praise your name

**All: for your unfailing love and your faithfulness**

**Leader:** When I called, you answered me;

**All: you greatly emboldened me.**

**Leader:** Though the Lord is exalted, he looks kindly on the lowly;

**All: though lofty, he sees them from afar.**

**Leader:** We worship You Lord in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

**All: Amen**

**Deuteronomy 10:12-22** <sup>12</sup> And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, <sup>13</sup> and to observe the LORD’s commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?

<sup>14</sup> To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. <sup>15</sup> Yet the LORD set his affection on your ancestors and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations—as it is today. <sup>16</sup> Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer. <sup>17</sup> For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. <sup>18</sup> He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. <sup>19</sup> And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt. <sup>20</sup> Fear the LORD your God and serve him. Hold fast to him and take your oaths in his name. <sup>21</sup> He is the one you praise; he is your God, who performed for you those great and awesome wonders you saw with your own eyes. <sup>22</sup> Your ancestors who went down into Egypt were seventy in all, and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars in the sky.

**Acts 10:23-35** The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the believers from Joppa went along. <sup>24</sup> The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. <sup>25</sup> As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. <sup>26</sup> But Peter made him get up. “Stand up,” he said, “I am only a man myself.”

<sup>27</sup> While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. <sup>28</sup> He said to them: “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. <sup>29</sup> So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?”

<sup>30</sup> Cornelius answered: “Three days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me <sup>31</sup> and said, ‘Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. <sup>32</sup> Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.’ <sup>33</sup> So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.”

<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.

*God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean (Acts 10:28)*

**These are the words of Peter standing in the midst of a family gathering of foreigners occupying his native land.**

**We jump from Paul’s story in Acts 9 to catch up with Peter. Peter and his care for the foreigner, and the controversy this causes dominate the next 3 chapters.**

**Peter sees Cornealius and his family as children of God. He has no choice in the matter. God has made it very clear. Do not call unclean, what I am making clean. We find this earlier in the chapter. Maybe you remember the odd story of Peter's vision of unclean animals laid out on a banquet cloth from heaven.**

***15 And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has made clean, do not call common." (Acts 10:15)***

**God says to Peter, and to you and I today, don't let your concepts of right and wrong cloud your ability to see what I am making clean. Three times God makes this crystal clear.**

**Peter – ‘when you walk into that room and see this man, and his kids, and his cousins... See them! I am at work in them. They will be connected to me, and I will use you to make that connection.’**

**Can you picture that encounter? What it was like for Peter to enter this home full of unfamiliar language and accents, chattering of children, completely out of his element. The Greek custom would be to offer a drink, a kiss, wash the guests' feet. Cornealius falls to his feet to worship him... Peter demands that he get up – I to am a man. He walks further into the room to find even more relatives and friends. Was he flustered... What was he expecting?**

**After acknowledging that he should not be there... He sees something. He sees human beings ... and he opens his mouth to express his surprise that what God says is true... *“Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, <sup>35</sup> but in every nation***

***anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. (Acts 10:34-35)***

**This was a surprise for him. That God would care for and make a connection possible for these men, women and children who have never been to Sunday school, never studied the torah, know nothing of the God they seek.**

**This should not be a surprise. It is dotted throughout the Old Testament law. Remember that God is God of all of creation. God cares for the poor and the foreigner as should you, because remember you to - were a foreigner in Egypt set free, made clean, redeemed by the mighty work of God.**

***For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. <sup>18</sup> He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. <sup>19</sup> And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt. (Deuteronomy 6:17-19)***

**And this is not a one off. It is not just this one section of Deuteronomy that the foreigner is mentioned. Through out the Bible when foreigners are mentioned comes the reminder of their foreignness. You also have been and are a foreigner in need of others grace and compassion.**

**When you give the temple tax you are caring for yes, the widow, the orphan and the Levite, but also the foreigner in the land. Seldom is the foreigner – the one who is struggling with the language, holding onto family traditions, does not know the customs of the land... Seldom is the foreigner left out of the list of those God uses the communities good will to be cared for.**

**And this is God's appeal. Do not call unclean, what I am redeeming. Jesus did not come into the world for those who had it all together. Jesus came for those who were in need.**

**What would it look like for us to pray, in spite of vested interest, for those who have not earned their way or been born into it?**

**What would it be like to see... our neighbor in spite of our political or cultural values?**

**Because let me tell you the Bible is clear. We do not come by this grace and acceptance naturally. It is our religious nature to divide the world into what is clean and what is unclean. It is unnatural for us to walk into a room of different accents, and clothing and customs and actually see people rather than differences.**

**What did God ask of Peter? He asked Peter to see the people in the room.**

**What would it look like for you to walk into a room, or have someone walk into your space ... who doesn't know the customs and your heart goes out to them in prayer. Actually I don't think this is something we have much control over. It is a gift from God that our hearts go out to others.**

**When we had our second Lil' Loves gathering in the newly built FLC. It was a beautiful gathering of people who don't always look at the world in the same way. We had nurses from two different organizations in town who are driven by very different ideals. That was powerful for me to witness. I**

**shouldn't have been surprised but I was. And I think they were too.**

**Our FLC was much like the room Peter walked into 2000 years ago. Families and relatives, translating for each other. I was not in my element.**

**As I passed out clothing, and tried to manage bottle necks for the 200 families that passed through our building that day... God gave me someone to see. A story to hear.**

**I talked in broken English with a young father holding a toddler. He was completely open with me about his story. His 2-month journey being smuggled through central America to avoid checkpoints. He and his wife and his children. Being lied to and stolen from, taken advantage of. Face to face with this man God gave me the ability to see him. I wanted to understand what it was like for him to get her and be here. I wanted to know what drives a person to take such risks. I wanted to see him as just another human being that God is working to redeem.**

**It broke my heart to think about the mixed messages that foreign countries are sending to refugees. Syrian's in Germany welcomed until the social systems became overwhelmed. African's in France enticed by government programs but finding little acceptance in local communities. The mixed messaging of US immigration that has only gotten worse in the last 6 years do in no small part to our 2-party system using immigrants to score political points.**

**The question going through my mind was not if my assisting him would legitimate a foreign policy I disagree with or even the act of human trafficking itself ... my thought was, 'what is God doing with him now.'**

**Face to face with this man God gave me the ability to see him.**

**God gives us the ability to see the foreigners in our lives! For our hearts to go out to others in prayer.**

**Because of Christ we, like Peter, find ourselves saying. *‘Truly I understand that God shows no partiality...***



“Peter in the House of Cornelius”, by Barend Fabritius, 1653