

**Text:** [Acts 10:1-16 \(CEB\)](#)  
**Date:** September 21, 2025  
**Title:** “Sacred/Secular” - Both/And Series Week 2  
**Theme:** When we stop dividing our experience, we’ll stop dividing people.

# 1

There are certain images that make enough of an impression that  
they stick with you throughout your life  
I remember back in the early part of my ministry  
I was at an event where our bishops were leading  
And the first thing in the morning was worship

We had this great worship service, one of the bishops there  
preached – and he was a great preacher  
So it was this really holy moment for me

We got to the end of the worship service, and the bishop says,  
“Ok, take fifteen minutes for a break and be back in your seats  
ready to begin our next session”  
Naturally, everyone heads for the bathrooms

And it is that time of the morning when a lot of people need the  
bathroom, if you know what I’m saying  
I was in line – a rare moment when there was a line for the men’s  
bathroom

When out of the corner of my eye, I see this same bishop  
approaching with what appeared to be a degree of *urgency*  
He was still wearing his robe from the worship service

And as he approached the bathroom door, people were stepping  
out of his way, offering him to jump the line  
Knowing he needed to get back for the next session  
“Thank you, thank you, I appreciate it, thank you”

Now at that point in my ministry, I had not spent that much time  
around bishops at all  
I didn't know any personally – they seemed like very high and  
lofty individuals

But here's what I want to say  
And the image I will never forget  
When I finally got in the bathroom, what I saw was an episcopal  
stole – its was clearly the bishop's stole  
Hanging over the door of one of the stalls  
Like a sign indicating that, at least for the moment, THIS was the  
episcopal office

So often, we want to pretend like our heroes aren't human  
And especially in the religious sphere, like they're not people  
That image returns to my mind whenever I am tempted to think of  
someone that way

## 2

We divide the world into the sacred and the secular  
The holy and the profane

We set up divides between religion and science  
Between gospel music and pop music

We create categories in ways that leave us very little room to  
understand the *unity* of our experience as a both/and  
Very little room to recognize the way that things can flip  
categories back and forth depending on how they're seen  
and interpreted

Kate and I were at a retreat this week  
We forgot a chalice for communion

So someone went to WalMart and bought a cheap wine glass for  
\$3.50

And we put it on the altar

Did it not become holy, simply by putting it on the altar?

I have had, and I imagine some of you have had, some of your  
holiest moments in places like National Parks

Or at dinner with dear friends

Maybe along some body of water – an ocean, bay, lake, or river

Or even at rock concerts

If you listen to Bruce Springsteen talk about what he's aiming for  
in his performances

It's clear he's hoping for something that feels like a revival

Like a religious experience

The last show I saw, I was tearing up nearly the whole way  
through it

And I felt ridiculous, but I couldn't help it

There are times when we encounter in the "secular"

Truths as profound as anything you will find in church

God's grace infuses the whole of human experience

That's the point of Jesus' becoming one of us

There is a human experience that is transcendent and holy

And every holy moment – whether it arrives on our doorstep via  
the sacred or the secular

I believe is a gift from God

### 3

Today's story from the book of Acts reveals how Peter came to  
this same conclusion

The scripture describes a man named Cornelius

A captain in the Roman army – that's what a centurion is –  
commander of a hundred  
A resident of Caesarea, a town literally built as an homage to the  
emperor

So...a captain in Rome's occupying army  
A Gentile living in a center of the cult of emperor worship  
From a Jewish perspective, you really can't imagine someone  
more secular than Cornelius

And yet, God was clearly at work in his life  
He was pious, praying constantly  
A generous giver who cared for people in need  
And so God saw fit to speak to him through an angel  
And told him that he must go meet Peter  
That he must go and hear the gospel

Peter, for his part, was still clinging to this sacred/secular split  
In the scriptures, it's clear that Peter was very resistant to  
welcoming non-Jews into the Christian faith  
In fact, in Galatians, Paul calls him out for it (2:11)

This story seems to hold the key to how Peter began to see a  
bigger picture  
He's praying – probably hungry  
When he has this vision of a big picnic blanket being let down  
from heaven  
And on that picnic blanket are not prepared foods  
But living creatures – every kind of bird, fish, and wild animal  
Things that Jews COULD eat, and many more things that they  
could NOT

And he hears this voice say, "Kill and eat."  
To which he responds, "Absolutely not. I have never eaten  
anything unclean, and I won't start now."

Though he was famished, he would rather go hungry than break  
the commandment

God replies: "Never consider unclean what God has made pure."

If you keep reading, what you learn is that at that very moment,  
some messengers from Cornelius showed up to fetch Peter  
Turns out, the vision wasn't really about food at all  
It was about people

The vision was preparing Peter for the next phase of his ministry  
"Never consider unclean what God has made pure."

#### 4

The divide we've made between what's sacred and secular  
Between what's holy and unholy  
Hasn't just been about what actions or behaviors have been in or  
out

But it's also driven our thoughts about WHO is in or out

And the reason why is this:

When we create these sharp, clearly delineated categories in our  
own lives, we cease to be able to approach the world,  
To approach people,  
To think even of ourselves as a unified whole

I mean, if I think of myself as a Christian only so long as I'm here  
in this pulpit

Or only so long as I'm here in the Church  
You'd agree that's problematic, right?

It's hard to live out our faith when we subdivide our identity into  
our church selves, our home selves, our work selves

But it's easy for us to fall into this

When worship is the one thing we do a week to connect with God

If we want to show up as whole people in the world, one of the  
solutions is to bring more of the sacred into our everyday  
To have that regular practice of prayer  
That regular practice of reading the scripture  
A regular group of folks we're meeting with to explore our faith, to  
pray for one another, to serve together

That's one of the primary purposes of the Church  
To help us make those connections that can sustain us not only  
on Sundays, but throughout the week  
That's why we offer things like Bible study and daily devotionals

It's not lost on me that Peter's vision comes as he is in his regular  
time of solo prayer  
Because there was unity in Peter's approach to life, God could  
speak directly to him about the unity of people  
"Never consider unclean what God has made pure."

Unity with others requires us to first experience unity in ourselves  
To overcome the sacred/secular divide that's down the center of  
our hearts  
Individual spiritual practice is key in that

The other key is in recognizing God as the source of all truth and  
beauty in the world  
As you stand on the rim of the Grand Canyon, or at the base of a  
giant sequoia, that's not a secular experience, is it?  
No, it's a sacred one

The cheesy T-shirt shops at the Jersey Shore may not feel sacred  
But take a few steps off the Boardwalk, put your feet into the  
ocean, and turn your eyes to the horizon  
Isn't there sacredness in that?

When you watch a movie that brings you to tears  
When your music playlist is exactly the inspiration you need to  
keep going  
Give thanks that God has blessed someone with gifts to speak  
truth, beauty and hope into your life

Unity in the world flows from the unity of our lives  
God spoke to Peter in prayer  
And gave him a vision that showed all of Creation as God's own  
Creation  
That there was no split

This is exactly why Jesus came into the world  
To show us that there is no division  
Between God and humanity  
Between heaven and earth  
Between sacred and secular

He came to hallow all of human existence  
So that we would hallow all of human existence  
Which includes human relationships

When we stop dividing our experience  
We'll stop dividing people  
We're going to talk more about this next week

But until then, I want to challenge you to recognize the holy in the  
everyday  
When you see something beautiful  
Stop and thank God  
When you have a genuine moment of human interaction  
Stop and thank God  
When you see what you have in common with someone very  
different from yourself  
Stop and thank God

When you see the unity in your own life  
You'll begin to see the unity that all of us share

Stop dividing your experience  
And you'll stop dividing people

Amen.

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