Devotional Reflection, Thursday, August 27, 2026
Proper 16, the week of the thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost
The Rev. David W. Perkins, Th.D.

The Afterglow of a Puzzling Moment

Key phrases for reflection from today's epistle reading:
30 Cornelius replied, 'Four days ago at this very hour, at three o'clock, I was praying in my house when suddenly a man in dazzling clothes stood before me. 31He said, "Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. 32Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon, who is called Peter; he is staying in the home of Simon, a tanner, by the sea." 33Therefore I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. So now all of us are here in the presence of God to listen to all that the Lord has commanded you to say.'

Daily Office Lectionary Readings (*BCP*, 981)
AM Psalm 18:1-20; PM Psalm 18:21-50
Job 8:1-10, 20-22; Acts 10:17-33; John 7:14-36

Today we celebrate the Feast of. Thomas Gallaudet and Henry W Syle. (See below.)

David's Reflection

Acts chapter 10 presents the reader with one of the most dramatic narratives in Scripture. In verse 20, while Peter is puzzling over the meaning of a visionary experience, the Spirit tells him to go down off the roof and accompany some men who have come for him and to do so without hesitation.

The humor involved in this remark would be lost on us were we not to read verses 1-15. Peter had a vision in which God instructed him to kill and eat animals let down from heaven in a sheet. Peter was hungry and they were preparing food for him downstairs. Three times Peter hesitated, that is he refused to obey God's voice because the animals were forbidden food to a strictly pious Jew. The angel does not explain the vision, and leaves Peter puzzling over its meaning; but, he was forbidden any more hesitation. Go with these men he was told. He must have been mulling all this over in puzzlement on the trek to Cornelius' house.

This story does not appeal to that streak in us desiring instant explanation and instant revelation. In this account in Acts, Peter had a vision whose meaning was unclear. Only later (verse 28), in light of his encounter with nonJews, especially Cornelius, does the meaning of the vision become clear. The command to eat unclean animals clearly was preparation for Peter's being sent to the home of a person he formerly would have regarded as unclean. The vision changed Peter's estimate of people like Cornelius. He even remained in Cornelius' house for a few days, which meant he would be sharing table, and probably Eucharist, with a new convert, a Gentile with whom Peter had been taught not to share a table.

It is to Peter's credit that he obeyed the voice, even though puzzled, and made the journey to Cornelius. He could bask in the afterglow of a puzzling moment.

Some of our most profound spiritual breakthroughs may come about as a result of our puzzling over something shining out at us in Scripture, in worship, in reflection, in a dream, in an experience. We may not know its meaning until the experience for which it was preparation presents itself. Then, in an epiphany moment, the "aha" comes and we get it. To put it another way, spiritual transformation involves moments of serious dis-ease and confusion. Those moments may not feel "normal," but it is in their abnormal and unsettling dimensions that God's life-giving light shines upon us and into our hearts.

Our openness to "unlearn" what we've always thought was true will be crucial. Peter unlearned his tradition. Just what might I need to unlearn? Can I live with being puzzled and push through to that moment of "aha," that afterglow of the puzzling moment?

Collect of the Day, Proper 16, The thirteenth Sunday After Pentecost
Grant, O merciful God, that your Church, being gathered together in unity by your Holy Spirit, may show forth your power among all peoples, to the glory of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.* (BCP, 232-233)

Today we celebrate the Feast of Thomas Gallaudet and Henry W Syle, priests and pioneers in ministry with the deaf.
http://www.satucket.com/lectionary/Gallaudet&Syle.htm
https://asdpioneers.com/people/thomas-h-gallaudet-and-family/

https://mydeaf.blog/2020/08/31/the-first-deaf-person-who-became-ordained-a-priest-in-usa/

Collect of the Feast of Thomas Gallaudet and Henry W Syle
O Loving God, whose will it is that everyone should come to you and be saved: We bless your holy Name for your servants Thomas Gallaudet and Henry Winter Syle, and we pray that you will continually move your Church to respond in love to the needs of all people; through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Collect for Protection
O God, the life of all who live, the light of the faithful, the strength of those who labor, and the repose of the dead: We thank you for the blessings of the day that is past, and humbly ask for your protection through the coming night. Bring us in safety to the morning hours; through him who died and rose again for us, your Son our Savior Jesus Christ. *Amen.* (BCP, 124)

For a child not yet baptized
O eternal God, you have promised to be a father to a thousand generations of those who love and fear you: Bless this child and preserve his/her life; receive and enable *him* to receive you, that through the Sacrament of Baptism *he* may become the child of God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* (BCP, 444)

A Prayer for Light
Lighten our darkness, we beseech you, O Lord; and by your great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night; for the love of your only Son, Jesus Christ, *Amen.* (BCP, 111)

A Collect for Mission
Everliving God, whose will it is that all should come to you through your Son Jesus Christ: Inspire our witness to him, that all may know the power of his forgiveness and the hope of his resurrection; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen. (BCP, 816-817)

Daily Office Epistle, Acts 10:17-33
17 Now while Peter was greatly puzzled about what to make of the vision that he had seen, suddenly the men sent by Cornelius appeared. They were asking for Simon's house and were standing by the gate. 18They called out to ask whether Simon, who

was called Peter, was staying there. 19While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Look, three* men are searching for you. 20Now get up, go down, and go with them without hesitation; for I have sent them.' 21So Peter went down to the men and said, 'I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for your coming?' 22They answered, 'Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say.' 23So Peter* invited them in and gave them lodging.

The next day he got up and went with them, and some of the believers* from Joppa accompanied him. 24The following day they came to Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. 25On Peter's arrival Cornelius met him, and falling at his feet, worshipped him. 26But Peter made him get up, saying, 'Stand up; I am only a mortal.' 27And as he talked with him, he went in and found that many had assembled; 28and he said to them, 'You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean. 29So when I was sent for, I came without objection. Now may I ask why you sent for me?'

30 Cornelius replied, 'Four days ago at this very hour, at three o'clock, I was praying in my house when suddenly a man in dazzling clothes stood before me. 31He said, "Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. 32Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon, who is called Peter; he is staying in the home of Simon, a tanner, by the sea." 33Therefore I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. So now all of us are here in the presence of God to listen to all that the Lord has commanded you to say.'

<u>Daily Offices in the Book of Common Prayer</u>
Morning Prayer, Rite 2, page 75, *The Book of Common Prayer*
Noonday Prayer, page 103, *Book of Common Prayer*
Order of Worship for Evening (Vespers), p 109, *Book of Common Prayer*
Evening Prayer, Rite 2, page 115, *Book of Common Prayer*
Compline (Night Prayer), page 127, *Book of Common Prayer*
Daily Devotionals, page 136, *Book of Common Prayer*