

# Boundary Breaking

The Spirit breaks open the community of Christ to move in new ways. How and where we set boundaries in Christian community is always subject to the gracious nature of God's love. The texts this week offer a new vision for God's people and for all creation. Where the Spirit leads, the church is called to follow in love.

## Focus scripture: Acts 11:1–18

The story of Acts has steadily moved to the church becoming more inclusive. Pentecost was a prelude to the welcome of Samaritan believers, of the Ethiopian official, and now of the "God-fearing," gentile Cornelius and his household. Peter reports to the Jerusalem elders that this is the work of the Spirit. Criticism of Peter gives way to praise of God.

The dietary codes set out in Leviticus 14 had defined what could and could not be eaten by followers of Judaism. In verse 6, Peter describes the animals he saw in his vision, coupled with the command to "kill and eat." The animals listed by Peter are not all "unclean." There is no distinction made between those that are "clean" and those that are not. Peter's naming of these animals parallels lists in Genesis 1:24 and 1:26. The summaries of God's creatures are followed closely by the declaration that all are "very good." That goodness of all creation is also a key element of this passage in Acts.

"Profane" is the centrepiece of Peter's initial objection to the vision. It is a word with various meanings. Peter uses it in the sense of something that is not holy. The more general meaning of the Greek word used here, *koinos*, is "common." This same word is the root of *koinonia*. As used in Acts and the epistles, *koinonia* serves as a synonym for the Christian community. *Koinonia* refers to the "common life" shared by those who follow the way of Jesus. Peter thought there was something wrong with things that are "common," yet our life within the Body of Christ is "common."

Peter appears before the Jerusalem believers, some of whom have taken exception to the mission to the Gentiles. It is not the first time, nor will it be the last, that witnesses to Jesus find themselves questioned. Earlier, it

had been by the Sanhedrin. Here and in Acts 15, it is by a council of Christian leaders. Later, it will be by local magistrates and Roman officials. Whatever the context, one central issue remains the same. How will those in authority balance commitment to tradition with openness to hearing a new word?

**Psalm 148** and **Revelation 21:1–6** share the theme of new ways of seeing and praising God. In the psalm, all creation has a part in God's praise. Even unclean things, as in Peter's vision, are given a voice and place. The author of Revelation celebrates God's working of a new creation. A new heaven and new earth invite a fresh perspective and bring hope.

**Revelation 21:4** gives witness to such love. In tenderness, God's love wipes away our tears. In power, God's love destroys death. Such love returns us to Acts, where all find a place in community by the grace of God's love.

Love as the touchstone of God's nature and activity stands at the core of **John 13:31–35**. On the cusp of betrayal by one of his disciples, Jesus gives a new commandment, "love one another" (v. 34). The term "commandant" recalls God's covenant with Moses. The new world – the new covenant – that Jesus ushers in is marked by love and serving rather than by betrayal and violence.

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God has done, and still does, new things in our midst. God seeks individuals and communities willing to risk new ways of seeing and receiving. How can we open ourselves to welcome the still emerging and unfolding story of God's gracious actions in our time? In what new ways might Jesus' command to love take shape for you and your faith community?



**Focus scripture**  
**Acts 11:1–18**

**Additional scriptures**  
**Psalm 148**  
**Revelation 21:1–6**  
**John 13:31–35**

**We praise you,  
O God, for the  
gift of creation  
and the surprise  
of re-creation.  
Open our eyes to  
see new things.  
Open our minds  
to think fresh  
thoughts. Open  
our communities  
to welcome new  
partners. Open  
our spirits to  
follow your Spirit.  
Amen.**

**Lectio Connection**  
links current events  
with this week's  
scriptures. Go to [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca) and  
click on the link.

## The Focus for Ages 5–12

In our increasingly mobile society it is likely that many children in your group may have an opportunity to interact with children and adults from other countries. At an age when they are beginning to notice the differences between themselves and others, these experiences provide a wonderful opportunity to learn from the richness and diversity of other cultures.

In these experiences children usually have quite definite likes and dislikes when it comes to food, and trying new foods is only done with great trepidation. Because the children will react visibly to the foods named in this week's story from Acts, you may want to explain that

there were Jewish dietary laws that determined which foods were considered "clean" (okay to eat) and "unclean" (forbidden). The deeper message of this story, beyond the dietary laws, is that God's love includes all people, indeed all of creation. Some in your group may have been excluded from a game or a team or just playing with a group. It is equally likely that each child has excluded another person at some time. This message is one that we encounter throughout our lives, causing us to continually assess whether we are excluding someone unfairly. Pray for the children in your group as they explore the deeper message of God's love for all.

## Prepare

### Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's scriptures, Psalm 148, Acts 11:1–18, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 83).
- ❑ Bring [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2) and, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* (Volume 5); *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 5); and CD or MP3 player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available for purchase at [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca).
- ❑ Set a worship space with white or yellow cloth, candle, offering basket, and Bible with bookmark in focus passage.

### Gather

- ❑ Bring, if possible, song, "Come, O Holy Spirit, Come/Wa, Wa, Wa Emimimo" (p. 12 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 5; #10 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 5).

### Engage

- ❑ Bring resource sheet "[Peter's Dream](#)" and study Bible with map of ancient Palestine showing Joppa and Caesarea.
- ❑ Option: song "Who Is a Disciple?" (pp. 42–43 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 5; #25 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 5)

- ❑ **Bible research group:** copies of resource sheet "[In or Out?](#)"

- ❑ **Map group:** world map

### Respond

Choose one or more of the activities. Prepare and bring the materials.

- ❑ **Story zone:** folded display board from last week, drawing paper, used magazines, newspapers, church magazines
- ❑ **Discussion zone:** no additional materials needed
- ❑ **Art zone:** poster board, pictures of wide variety of people and other living things (cut from used magazines), art supplies
- ❑ **Craft zone:** large piece of felt, small felt pieces (cut into circles, squares, octagons, and triangles), buttons, braid, yarn, fabric glue, permanent felt marker, dowel, length of cord
- ❑ **Outreach zone:** copies of resource sheet "[Welcome Shapes](#)"

### Bless

- ❑ Bring, if possible, song "Put On Love" (p. 29 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 5; #18 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 5).



# Boundary Breaking

**Scripture**  
Acts 11:1–18

**FOCUS** To hear the story of Peter’s vision and grow in our understanding that God’s love is for all

## Gather

**Welcome** the children as they arrive and introduce newcomers. Remind the group that we are in the Season of Easter and invite them to participate in the Easter greeting by repeating each phrase after you: “Christ has risen! He has risen indeed. Alleluia!”

### Opening ritual

**Call to gather** Invite the children to gather in the worship space and light the candle, a sign of God’s presence.

**Sing or listen to**, if possible, the song “Come, O Holy Spirit, Come/Wa, Wa, Wa Emimimo” (p. 12 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 5; #10 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 5).

**Pray** this prayer based on **Psalm 148**, inviting children to repeat each line after you.

Praise God from the heights of heaven!

Let all the angels praise God!

Sun, and moon, and shining stars, praise God!

Sea monsters and deep oceans, praise God!

Fire and hail, snow and stormy winds, praise God!

Mountains and hills, trees and birds, praise God!

Young and old, kings and all people, praise God!

Alleluia! Amen.

Receive the offering and extinguish the candle to signify the end of the gathering worship.

## Connecting with the focus

Invite children to name some of the groups they belong to and talk about what they like most about being in these groups. Invite them also to think about what happens when teams or clubs make rules that mean only some people can be included.

Share stories of experiences of both inclusion and exclusion.

## Engage

### Preparing for the story

Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship area and use the bookmark to open it to the book of Acts. Recall that during the Easter season we have been reading from the book of Acts, a collection of stories about the disciples, Jesus’ followers. Help the children recall the previous stories about Peter: when he and the other apostles couldn’t stop telling everyone about Jesus even when they were put in jail (**Acts 5:27–32**) and when he went to Joppa to see Tabitha (**Acts 9:36–43**). In this week’s story Peter is still in Joppa. Invite a volunteer to find Joppa on a map

of ancient Palestine. In this week’s story Peter has a dream that will lead him to another city, Caesarea, where he will meet Cornelius, an officer in the Roman army. Invite a volunteer to find Caesarea on the map. Cornelius wasn’t Jewish but he and all his family worshipped God. Cornelius prays to God every day and gives generously to all people who need help.” Ordinarily Cornelius and Peter would have nothing to do with each other because Peter was a Jew and Cornelius was not and the Jewish religious laws said that Jews should not to be around people who were not Jewish, not to eat with them or visit their homes.

### The Bible story

Use the resource sheet, "[Peter's Dream](#)" to tell the story based on Acts 11:1-18. After the story, ask:

- **What questions do you have about this story?**
- **What message was God sending to Peter in this dream?**
- **How did Peter's act of visiting Cornelius show that everyone was included in God's love?**

**Sing** if possible, verse 6 and chorus of the song "Who Is a Disciple?" (pp. 42-43 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 5; #25 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 5).

### Exploring the story further

*(To enable the children to explore the scripture reading further, according to their interests and abilities, explain the two options and have each child select one.)*

**Bible research group** The children in this group will have an opportunity to learn more about the background for this story. Distribute copies of the

resource sheet "[In or Out?](#)" Review the first section together, then form two groups learn about food laws and the Gentiles.

**Map group** The children in this group will have an opportunity to explore the vision of inclusion. Gather around a world map and invite children to point out places they have lived or visited. Notice all the different countries and point out that each one has its own customs and languages. Peter's vision helped the people in the early church to understand that no one is excluded from God's love. Invite children to name ways they can include others and share God's love.

**Reporting** Invite the research group to share some information and invite the map group to name ways to include others.

### The Bible story and us

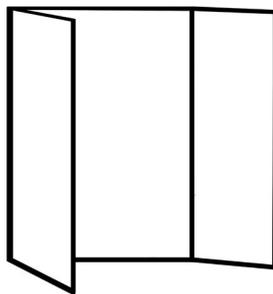
- **What does Peter's vision teach us about God's way?**

## Respond

Invite the children to select a zone and work with the materials there.

- **Story zone: Easter triptych** (*ongoing activity*)

Invite the group to continue creating a display that will summarize the stories they will hear during the Easter season. Have them fill in the fourth section with a drawing of Peter's dream. Use letters and words cut from magazines to make the words "Peter's vision" and glue these onto the left side of the triptych. Then choose a picture from a magazine or newspaper of a contemporary image of inclusion and glue this onto the other side.



- **Cooperative zone: Discussion** (*for older children*) Through his actions, Peter was able to demonstrate God's inclusive nature. Invite children to imagine that they are going to start a



club to help the children focus on including others. Have them come up with a name for the club. On newsprint, list some rules for the club (such as everyone is included, everyone's opinion will be listened to). Make another list of those who would be invited to be in this club. Talk together about some clubs or groups that participants know where this kind of inclusion is practiced.

- **Art zone: Collage** Peter learned that God's love is for every person and every other living thing in the world. Invite children to use the magazine pictures to create a vibrant collage of images on a sheet of poster board to illustrate God's inclusive love. They might like to use the art supplies to create their own pictures to add to the collage. Display the finished collage with a title chosen by the children.

□ **Craft zone: Banner** Peter learned that the good news of God’s love is for everyone. Distribute the different shapes of felt pieces and invite children to each create a felt face using buttons and other decorating materials. When faces are completed, glue them on to the large piece of felt and use a permanent marker to print a title (such as “God Welcomes Us All”). To finish the banner, staple a “hem” along the top edge of the felt and slip a wooden dowel into the hem pocket. Tie cord to the ends of the dowel for a hanger.

□ **Outreach zone: Offering welcome** (*for younger children*) Peter learned that God’s love was for everyone in the whole world. Distribute copies of the resource sheet “[Welcome Shapes](#)” and review the instructions together. Invite children to decorate and cut out their sets of figures. Have them think of those to whom they might give these “welcome shapes”; encourage them to consider giving some to their families and some to others in the congregation during the fellowship time after the service.

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## Bless

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**Gather** around the worship area and relight the candle.

**Sing or listen to**, if possible, the song “Put On Love” (p. 29 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 5; #18 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 5).

**Pray** Offer this prayer or one of your own:

Loving God, thank you  
for the story of Peter and Cornelius,  
that helps us know that your love  
is for everyone. Amen.

**Blessing** Send children out with the following blessing:  
“Remember that God’s love includes everyone.”

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## Reflect

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What did you discover about the experiences the children have had in facing exclusion, or as they included others? What range of interactions do you notice in the group? How can you continue to make sure the group is a place where everyone is included and welcomed?



# PETER'S DREAM

(based on Acts 11:1-18)

To familiarize yourself with more details for this story, read it in the Bible too.

**P**eter was in Joppa. You may remember that Joppa is where Dorcas lived. Peter was staying with Simon. One day, Peter went to the roof of Simon's house to pray. While there, Peter became hungry. As he prayed, Peter had a dream, a most amazing dream. A large sheet came down from the sky, as if something was holding it by the four corners. As it came closer, he could look inside, where he saw all kinds of animals: donkeys, camels, sheep, goats, pigs, deer, turtles, snakes, eagles, ostriches, songbirds, and more.

Now Peter was hungry, and a voice came from heaven, "Get up, Peter, cook and eat." Peter looked at the animals in the sheet. Some were animals that he knew Jews were forbidden to eat because they were unclean. So Peter answered, "Oh no, God, I have never eaten any forbidden food and I will not do so now."

Then the voice said, "What God has made clean, you must not say is unclean."

At that moment, three people arrived at Simon's gate seeking Peter. When they told Peter that Cornelius, a Roman soldier in

Caesarea, had sent them to ask Peter to come to talk with him, Peter wasn't sure what to do. How could Peter, a Jew, go to the house of Cornelius, a non-Jew, a Gentile? Aha, now Peter's dream was beginning to make sense. The dream was God's way of letting Peter know that all that God created is good.

So Peter, the three sent by Cornelius, and friends of Peter set off for Caesarea. When they arrived, Cornelius was overjoyed. "But," asked Peter, "how did you know to find me at Simon's house?"

"In a dream, I saw an angel. The angel told me that you had a message for me, a message of good news," said Cornelius.

Peter told them about Jesus the Christ, and how Jesus showed how to live in God's way. As Peter spoke, he could see that the Holy Spirit had come to Cornelius and all his family. "Would you like to be baptized?" asked Peter.

"Yes," said Cornelius. "We want to be baptized and to follow in the way of Jesus." So Peter baptized Cornelius and all his family that day.

Later Peter went to Jerusalem to tell what had happened to the leaders of Jesus' followers there. When they heard this, they were so amazed they could not speak. Then they praised God and said, "God has given new life to everyone, not just to us."



# In or Out?

**W**hat do you like to eat? At least part of the time we have choices. Sometimes we choose not to eat things because we don't like them. Sometimes we choose not to eat a certain animal or plant in order to protect it.

Have you heard of the dodo bird? It used to live on islands off the coast of Africa. When the Europeans went exploring the world in their ships in the 1500s through the 1700s, some of them would stop on the islands to get more food. The dodos were about as big as turkeys, but they couldn't fly, and they were clumsy – easy to catch and eat. Now they are extinct, all eaten up.

In some parts of the world today, some animals are in danger of becoming extinct, at least in part, because people are eating them. One example is the gorilla in Africa. Wild animal meat is called bush meat. Some people might eat bush meat because it is the only meat they can get. But other people pay lots of money to eat gorilla meat in fancy restaurants in some cities in Africa.

## Food Laws in the Bible

The Jewish people had some laws about what they could eat. Food they could eat was called clean. What do you think they called food they weren't supposed to eat?

In your Bible find Deuteronomy 14:3-19.

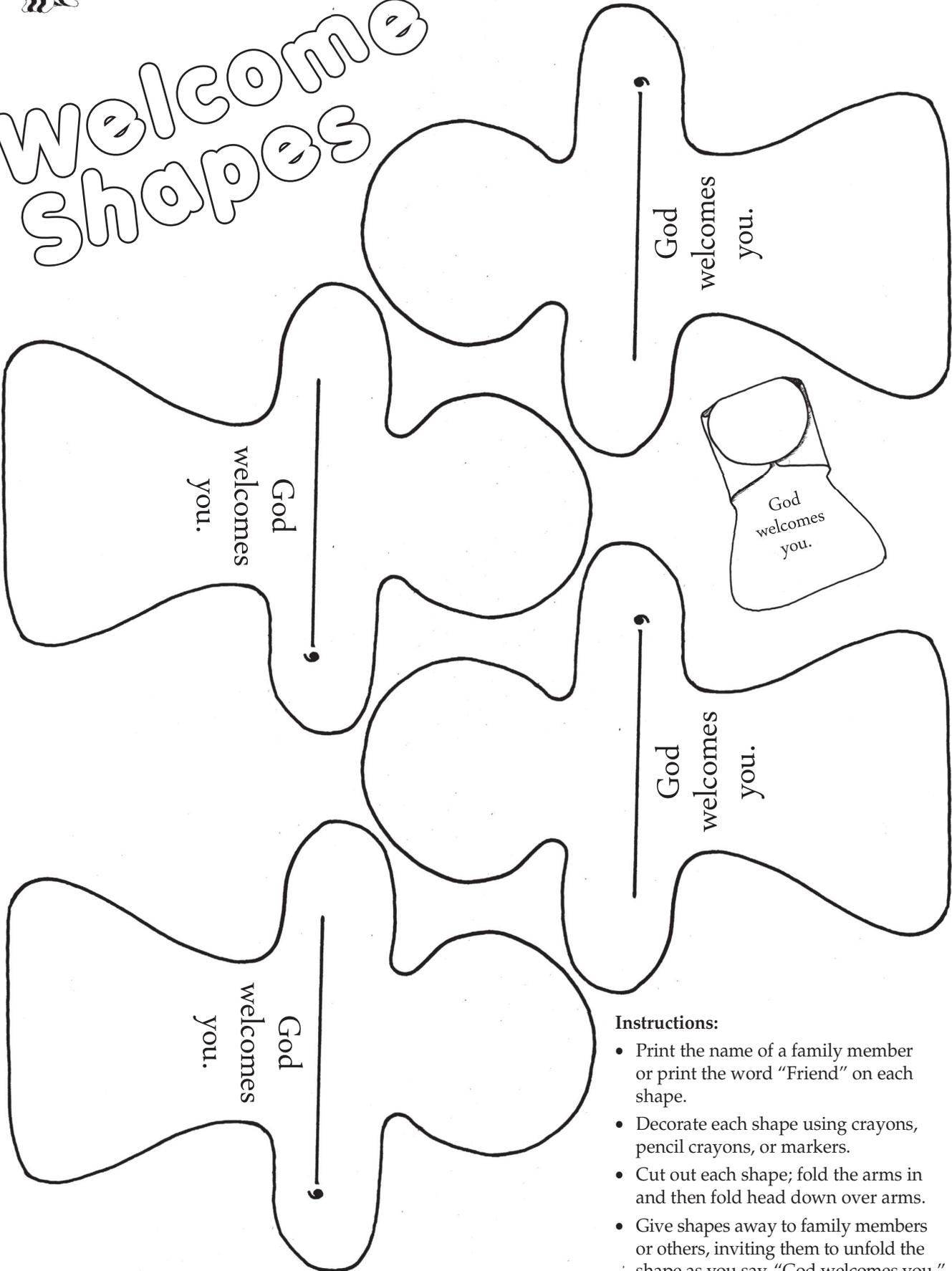
- Name some animals the Jews could eat (verse 4).
- Name some animals they couldn't eat (verses 7b-8).
- What kinds of birds couldn't the Jews eat (verses 12-18)?
- What kinds of insects could they eat and not eat (verses 19-20)?

## Gentiles

The Jewish people were not only concerned about the foods they could eat and not eat. They were also concerned about the people they could be friends with. They had a word for all the people in the world who were not Jewish. They called them Gentiles. For the most part Gentiles did not believe in God, but they worshipped lots of other gods. The Jews tried to avoid the Gentiles. They didn't think it was right to be friends with people who didn't believe in God. It was also against the Jewish law to eat with Gentiles – partly because Gentiles would eat all kinds of unclean things. But Jesus was Jewish and he didn't mind being with Gentiles and other outcasts. As the Christian movement of the Way grew, many Gentiles became part of it and were part of the first churches.



# Welcome Shapes



**Instructions:**

- Print the name of a family member or print the word "Friend" on each shape.
- Decorate each shape using crayons, pencil crayons, or markers.
- Cut out each shape; fold the arms in and then fold head down over arms.
- Give shapes away to family members or others, inviting them to unfold the shape as you say, "God welcomes you."