



Series: Unstoppable (Part 17)

Speaker: Tiffany Goh

INTRODUCTION

'New Normal' - it may seem ironic to keep using this phrase, seeing how it has been in constant circulation in Singapore ever since the 2011 General Elections, and is, as a result, no longer new. Yet, as creatures of habit, many of us find it difficult to adapt to the present changes that have come with this COVID-19 pandemic. We continue to yearn for things to 'go back to normal', including being able to gather in large groups for meals and events, visit the homes of our loved ones, and move about Singapore freely without the need for a mask. Even more so, we wish that we can worship, pray, and serve together as a church once again, without restrictions!

Even if some of our minds have said 'Yes' to embracing the New Normal, many of our hearts have taken a longer time to be as responsive. Perhaps, we have found ourselves still wrestling in conversation with God and our communities, asking if it is really necessary to embrace this New Normal.

We are not alone. About 2,000 years ago, the early church was faced with a different New Normal that challenged everything about their deeply-rooted beliefs in God. Yet, God was the One orchestrating this transition and inviting them into the partnership.

DISCUSSION

1. What does the COVID-19 'New Normal' mean for your life, personally? Do you find it difficult to embrace this newness, or are you thriving in it? Why?
2. Read Acts 10:9-16.
 - a. In verses 10-16, identify one or more way(s) that God was trying to get Peter's attention.
 - i. Is God trying to get your attention in this season, and how so?
 - b. Why did Peter respond as such in verse 14? To understand the context of the Jewish custom, read Leviticus 11.
 - i. Why was being 'unclean' such a big problem to a Jew?
 - c. What did God mean by verse 15? Did it indicate that He had changed His standard of holiness?
 - i. Look at Leviticus 11:44-47. Why do you think He wants His people to be "holy, as I am holy"?
 - ii. What do these texts reveal about the heart of God, and His desire towards His people?
 - d. How might your understanding of God from question 2cii shape your life today?
3. Read Acts 10:19-22. By Jewish custom, it is frowned upon to associate with Gentiles, let alone invite them into one's home or to go to their home. Look at Peter's response in verse 23. What do you think caused his change of heart?
4. Read the rest of Acts 10.
 - a. What is this 'New Normal' that God was introducing to the early church through Peter? (Look at verse 34. Also refer to Ephesians 2:11-22, Romans 3:29-30, and Galatians 3:28.)
 - b. Peter declares in verse 27 that, under this 'New Normal', righteousness through cleanliness has nothing to do with a dietary restriction or the association with a certain people group. What are the new conditions for righteousness and cleanliness? (See Romans 3:21-31, Hebrews 9)
 - c. What does this say about the heart of God towards us, especially after reading about the Mosaic law earlier, in question 2b?
 - d. How does this understanding affect how we think about the people around us, those whom we ourselves might believe to be 'unclean'?

5. Does the parallel between the apostles' 'New Normal' and our COVID-19 'New Normal' hold completely? Why or why not?

WHAT WOULD YOU DO

The early church responded to their 'New Normal' in two parts. Their initial response (Acts 10:14, 11:1-3) was not positive, because they were accustomed to the former ways and practices of the faith. However, this changed once they understood God's desire to give the Gentiles the same gift of salvation (Acts 10:28-29, 11:17-18).

Because of the early church's submission to God's 'New Normal' plan, we get to enjoy a new life under the lordship of Jesus Christ. Our sins have been atoned for, and we can stand before God, clean and righteous not by our works, but by faith in Christ, who died for us and paid the price for our sins. Isn't it a blessing that the early church laid down their old perceptions and allowed the Holy Spirit to move through them for the expansion of the Kingdom?

Though the 'New Normal' we are facing is not as extreme as that which the early church faced, we can, too, turn to God and seek an understanding of what He wants the church to do in a new way, today.

MEMORY VERSE

*Behold, I am doing a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert.*
- Isaiah 43:19 (ESV)