**Not a New Problem.** Purebreds and scrubs. Sadly, the divisions we make between people have been around for a long time. Go back in the Bible to the time of Ezra when the people of Israel returned to Jerusalem after a period of exile. Ezra the priest rejected marriages between Israelites and foreigners, saying to the people, “*You have trespassed and married foreign women, and so increased the guilt of Israel…separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives*” (Ezra 10:10-11). In other words, separate yourselves from the scrubs!

This concern for purity is also found in the New Testament. The apostle Peter is on a rooftop praying, and he becomes hungry. He has a vision of “*all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air*” (Acts 10:12). Scrub bulls! Then a voice says, “*Get up, Peter; kill and eat*.” But Peter said, “*By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean*” (vv. 13-14). For a religious man like Peter, only purebred food would do.

But then the divine voice said, “*What God has made clean, you must not call profane*” (v. 15). What a game-changing insight. Suddenly, all the Courts of Bovine Justice are discredited, and Peter realizes that he can have relationships with people beyond the nation of Israel. He meets with a God-fearing Gentile named Cornelius, a Roman centurion, and concludes that “*God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him*” (vv. 34-35). No more purebreds and no more scrubs. At God’s initiative, through the atoning death of Jesus for our redemption, and by the power of God’s Spirit joining Christians together there is no longer any distinction between persons. All are children of God. All receive God’s grace. All are empowered by the same Spirit of God.

**A Vision of Equality.** Just a short time later, the apostle Paul is traveling with Timothy and Silas through Turkey. One night, Paul has a vision: He sees a man from Macedonia in Greece, one who begs Paul to “*come over to Macedonia and help us*” (Acts 16:9). Macedonia wasa Roman colony run by a bunch of Gentiles (“scrubbers”) who had little respect for the laws and traditions of Israel. Macedonia boasted unscrupulous businessmen, a thriving slave trade, and Roman magistrates who would readily arrest the followers of Jesus and throw them into prison.

Yet, in response to this vision, Paul says, “Let’s go!” Acts tells us that Paul, Timothy, and Silas “*immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them*” (v. 10). When it comes to preaching the good news of Jesus Christ, there are no scrub bulls of Macedonia. The three men sailed from Troas to Samothrace, and then on to Neapolis, and finally reached Philippi, a leading city of Macedonia. They stayed in the city for several days, and then went down to the river to pray. They talked with a group of women, following the example of Jesus in showing respect and honor to women.

There was a successful businesswoman named Lydia, and Acts tells us that the “*Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul*” (v. 14). Lydia accepted the good news that Paul shared, and Paul baptized Lydia and her whole household. Then Lydia offered them hospitality, saying, “*If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home*” (v. 15). They received Lydia as a sister in the Christian faith with no concern about genetic purity. Lydia became the very first European convert to Christianity.

**Everyone Is Pure.** So, if the Gospel preaches unity in Christ, why do we continue to separate one from another? If Christ came to break down the dividing walls (Ephesians 2:14), why do we keep building them? If there is one God, one Spirit, one baptism, and one faith, why are we always at odds with one another? If we are all children of God, why is there still “us” and “them”? Why do we still separate people into purebreds and scrubs? In many congregations, the welcoming of strangers from foreign lands and unfamiliar cultures is a challenge. Across America today, immigrants are coming to church, just as they always have. But where previous waves of immigrants were largely European, these new arrivals are coming from non-Western countries with cultures and skin colors more alien to white Americans than that of Europeans.

Sometimes, these newcomers rattle established churches by introducing new worship styles and beliefs, which is not always well received. Said one church member after witnessing a spirited service from a different culture in the church she attended since 1955, “If they want to worship that way, fine with me. But don’t bring it into my sanctuary.” She saw the newcomers as scrubs.

To overcome this bias, we need to expand our thinking, basing it on the understanding that everyone is made “in the image of God,” (Genesis 1:27). “When you meet another person,” says author and pastor John Pavlovitz, “you are coming face-to-face with a once-in-history, never-to-be-repeated reflection of the image of God.…If God is God, there’s no other option: they are each made of God stuff.…Every single day you encounter thousands of breathing, animated thumbnails of the Divine.” Whether black, white, Asian, European, African, Latino or Native American, a person is made of “God stuff.” In the eyes of God, everyone is purebred.

We need to practice true Christian hospitality, showing the same kind of welcome that Jesus showed the people of his day. We do this by sitting down with folks on the margins of society, just as Jesus broke bread with “*tax collectors and sinners*” (Matthew 9:10), the scrub bulls of first-century Israel. Such a welcome requires a commitment to embrace all people as God embraced us in Christ. It involves a willingness to see everyone as a child of God, a sinner for whom Christ died, a person bearing the image of God no matter how obscured that image might be through personal sinfulness or societal prejudice.

Church will continue to be like the “Courts of Bovine Justice” until we make a serious commitment to embrace all people with God’s love and grace. This means training ourselves to receive and include everyone into the life of the church. It requires crafting worship in such a way that it moves people to invite their friends and neighbors to services. True hospitality is practiced when we learn to offer meals in which people can gather around tables for conversations, leading to the development of relationships. True welcome is experienced when newcomers join small groups where they can grow in faith and in deep-spirited friendships. Purebreds and scrubs. That distinction broke down for the apostle Paul in Philippi, and it can break down for us, too, when we remember Paul’s words: “*There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*” (Galatians 3:28).

Prayer: Unifying God, thank You that I am a member of Christ’s Body and accepted in Him. I am redeemed and forgiven. I am a child of God, through time and into eternity. Thank You for uniting us all in one faith and in one spirit, in one baptism, and serving one Lord. We are all one in Christ Jesus. In Jesus' name, AMEN.

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**Scrub Bulls of Macedonia**

Sunday, May 22, 2022  [Acts 16:9-15](https://biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+16%3a9-15&language=en&version=NIV)

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, Mn

Do you know the difference between a purebred bull and a scrub bull? A purebred bull is just what the name implies: a bull that is carefully bred from good stock for breeding purposes. A scrub bull is a one that escapes the roundup and is not castrated. These feral bulls are aggressive and pose a threat to rancher’s herds. Scrub bulls can wreak havoc by scattering or diminishing the genetic integrity of herd.

One hundred years ago, bulls appeared in courtrooms for trials intended to sort the purebreds from the “scrubbers.” In one case, police escorted the defendant, a “Mr. Scrub Bull,” into a makeshift courtroom in Pickens County, South Carolina (October 1922). He stood on four legs in front of Magistrate James McElroy Jameson, while a court officer read the bill of indictments. “The defendant works in a very underhand way,” the officer declared, “stealing the profits from every dairyman and butcher who has common cows, robbing the unsuspecting, the careless, and the ignorant alike, causing their innocent children to suffer for milk and working men to be in want of meat.” The charge leveled against Mr. Scrub Bull was genetic impurity. He was not a purebred bull.

Such trials seem strange, but the United States Department of Agriculture endorsed them, and they became quite popular. Across the country, cattle stood trial in front of crowds that could number in the thousands. The trials had real judges and real lawyers, witnesses, and jurors. These “Courts of Bovine Justice” issued real verdicts as to whether an animal was fit to breed. The judge might conclude that the animal was an “unworthy father,” one whose very existence was “detrimental to the progress and prosperity of the public at large.” If convicted, the scrub bull would be led away, shot, and barbecued.

These bizarre cattle courts reflected a darker movement in American history, the rise of eugenics. This philosophy aimed to limit the reproduction of people it deemed unfit. According to *Mother Jones* magazine, “historians estimate that more than 60,000 Americans were sterilized in the decades leading up to the Second World War, with many more persecuted under racist immigration laws and marriage restrictions.” Sixty-thousand Americans declared scrub bulls, unfit for reproduction. As ridiculous as it sounds, many people considered eugenics good science, a way to breed out the bad characteristics in human beings.