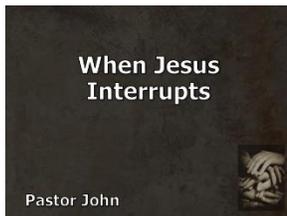


"When Jesus Interrupts"

May 6, 2018

Scripture: Acts 10: 44-48

⁴⁴ While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. ⁴⁵ The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, ⁴⁶ for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, ⁴⁷ "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" ⁴⁸ So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.



Today we come to the conclusion of our Easter sermon series. Over the course of the six weeks that comprises Eastertide we have looked at how we need to belong before we ever begin to behave and believe like Christians. We began the first few weeks looking at how Jesus made Mary and his disciples feel like they still belonged to Him, now resurrected but very much alive and present. In each of these messages we also looked at how Jesus invites us to belong and to help others belong. Two weeks ago, we looked at how our presence can make others feel a sense of belonging. Then, last week, we looked at the barriers that we put up and at the barriers that others put up themselves that keep them from engaging the call of God upon their lives. Last week, in the third GPS question, I challenged you all to come up with your faith story. This two-minute 'elevator speech' is simply the story of how Jesus makes us feel like we each belong to Him. Our story of faith is a story that we need to know in order to share it with others. If you do not

know your faith story and how you can share it with others so that they too can know the good news of Jesus Christ in your life, then it still remains a challenge. If so, I hope you take up that challenge this week. Let us pray.

In today's passage we find another example of Jesus' backwards model of bringing people to faith. As we think back through the Bible we see over and over the pattern of God and then Jesus inviting people into positions of leadership with absolutely no credentials and with no indications of their potential to be a great leader. God chose stuttering Moses, young David, shy Gideon, and so on. Jesus chose fishermen, rebels, tax collectors, prostitutes, and so on. Today He chooses lawyers and teachers and construction workers and mothers and addicts. He chooses you and me. He makes each and every one of us feel like we belong in His presence and offers us the free gifts of His love and mercy.

In Jesus' ministry we see example after example where He welcomed the outsider, the sinner, the outcast, and made them feel like they belonged. Only when they felt like they belonged and that they were loved did Jesus go on to teach them about behavior and belief. We recall that this was often to the consternation of the ruling religious authorities and often put Jesus at odds with those in power. In today's passage we see how this pattern of tipping over and reversing the understood order of things continues as the Holy Spirit of Jesus leads and guides and acts in the lives of non-believers. This pattern continues today. Jesus continues to interrupt our lives. Thanks be to God.

Today we look at how, through the Holy Spirit, Jesus interrupted Peter. But, of course, this is not the first time that Jesus has interrupted Peter. As a matter of fact, this is not even the first time that the resurrected Jesus has interrupted Peter. But before we get to the interruption, let's review how God has been at work in Peter's life up to this point. In Matthew 16 Jesus had said to Peter in verse 18, *"You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church"*. Although the road was a bit rocky to get to this point, by this time in Acts, Peter is living out what Jesus had said in John 21 when He commissioned Peter to *"feed my sheep"*. By this point in the book of Acts, Peter is clearly established as the leader of the church. But the Holy Spirit is also moving in strange, new ways.

In recent months the church's understanding of 'normal' has shifted and the movements of the Holy Spirit have become very unpredictable. A man formerly named Saul has been converted to belief in Jesus and, now as Paul, is one of the strongest voices for the Gospel. In Acts 10, Peter has a vision that challenges and disrupts his own personal understanding of the church. On the way to Joppa, Peter goes up on a roof to pray and God shows Peter a large sheet with all kinds of *"four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air"* on the sheet. God instructs him to eat, but Peter protests, saying, *"I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean"*. Reptiles and birds and some of the four-footed creatures were considered unclean and therefore Jewish Law forbade eating them. But God corrects Peter, saying, *"What God has made clean, you must not call profane"*. In other words, all that God created is good and can be eaten. This is the first step to understanding what God reveals in today's passage.

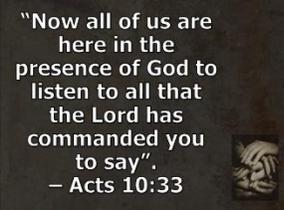




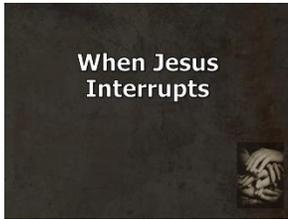
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Just prior to today's passage, God gives a vision to Cornelius, a Roman centurion who feared God, who gave alms to the poor, and prayed devoutly. In Romans 10:5 God tells Cornelius, "*Send men to Joppa for a certain Simon who is called Peter*". Peter has his vision up on the rooftop and then, as he is considering what the vision means, Cornelius' men arrive to invite Peter to come to Capernaum. Can you imagine? Peter, a disciple and the leader of the church is Jerusalem, is invited to go to the home of a Gentile. Not only that, but this man is a commander in the occupying army. But Peter hears the voice of the Holy Spirit telling him to go. He probably doesn't quite have the sheet vision figured out and now the Spirit is telling him to go to the home of a Gentile from the occupying army. Can you imagine?

Peter is led by the Holy Spirit to go to the home of the centurion. Cornelius welcomes Peter and invites him to speak, saying, "*Now all of us are here in the presence of God to listen to all that the Lord has commanded you to say*". Following this wonderful invitation, Peter begins to preach about God's invitation to all people to accept Jesus as Lord. Peter begins to preach away and suddenly the Holy Spirit interrupts. This is where our passage today picks up the story in Acts 10. Peter begins to preach to this crowd of gathered outsiders and then all heaven breaks loose. Probably right in the middle of the best line from his well-crafted sermon, the Holy Spirit falls upon all those gathered there. It does not fall on Peter and the believers that came with him from Jerusalem, but it falls on Cornelius and all the other Gentiles gathered there too.



"Now all of us are
here in the
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the Lord has
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to say".
– Acts 10:33

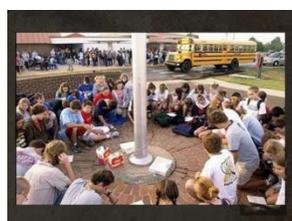


Time out! It falls upon all the non-believers that were gathered there that day. That is NOT how it is supposed to happen. Gentiles hear the word of God and they become curious. This leads them to become “proselytes” – people who commit to a season of learning the behaviors of the faith. They learn what to eat and not to eat and they learn the purification rituals and other Laws of the Torah. Then they profess their belief in Jesus Christ as Savior and then they are baptized in the water, as a sign and seal of their new identity. And then they are baptized by the Holy Spirit and THEN they are filled by the living presence of the risen Christ. This is how it is supposed to happen. That’s how we do things around here.

Not today folks. Just as Peter is beginning to introduce these Gentiles to the truths of the faith, the Spirit of Christ rudely interrupts and willy-nilly starts baptizing all of these non-believers with the Holy Spirit. All of the learning and other steps are skipped right over as they pass “Go” and immediately begin speaking in tongues and extolling God. What in the world is God up to?

This passage reminds me of an experience I had at a Promise Keeper’s event in Denver, Colorado. About 12 years ago I went with a group of guys from the church to a Promise Keeper’s event. For those of you that do not know what a Promise Keeper’s event is, it was a gathering of anywhere from twenty to sixty thousand men who would come to a two-day conference to listen to speakers, to sing praises to God, and to grow in their faith. They were moving and powerful

events. Here is what a typical event would look like. The event I am referring to just happened to be the week before the annual "See You at the Pole" event. This is a day when all across the nation youth gather at the flag pole at their school to pray for their school, their teachers, and their fellow students. At the Promise Keeper's events, they would run announcements for different things on the screens in the arena. Being a teacher and helping students to put on the "See You at the Pole" event every year at the school I taught at, I thought it would be a great marriage to have that event on the announcement screens. How great would it be to share that at an event where thousands of dads would



be encouraged to go and pray with their children at an event that was happening the very next Wednesday? I headed off to find the people in charge of the announcement screens so we could get that invitation up there. I even thanked God in a quick prayer for planting that idea in my head. I left my seat with great enthusiasm and high hopes.

Soon I found out where to go and went and shared my great idea with the man in charge. He asked for a moment to consult with others and shortly returned to inform me that they could not project a "See You at the Pole" announcement on their Promise Keeper's screens. Turns out that the two organizations are not the same and Promise Keepers could not promote another organization's event. I was stunned. Then the man asked if he could walk me to the prayer room where they would pray for the upcoming "See You at the Pole" event. My initial reaction was "NO!" But I reluctantly agreed.

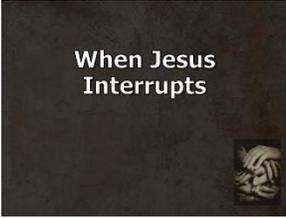
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We entered the prayer room and the man explained the situation to the woman in charge. She asked me to stand in the center of the room and lots of people gathered around me and laid hands on me as they began to pray for me and for my school and for the upcoming "See You at the Pole" event. I hate to admit it, but you could say that I was not the most willing prayer recipient. As I prepared to stomp off back to my seat, a young lady asked for a minute of my time. It was then that Jesus interrupted my life.

This young woman shared that while they were praying, she had a vision. She shared that while they were praying, God gave her a vision of me in heaven. She said that she saw me wearing a charm bracelet that was filled with lots of charms that looked like little children. She said that God told her that each charm represented a child who I had impacted for Christ. The young woman said she just wanted to share that with me as a way to encourage me to keep doing what I was doing. I did not stomp back to my seat. I slowly walked back to my seat rejoicing that God had spoken to me through a total stranger. God totally disrupted what I thought should happen. This interruption was one of a few that led me to stand here before you today. God's plans were far better than anything I could have ever imagined happening that day in Denver. Again, thanks be to God.





When Jesus
Interrupts

In our passage today, Peter asks, "*Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have*"? The power of God was clearly at work and there was nothing that Peter or anyone else could do but to become a part of the work of God. So why not become a part of what God was already doing?

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is once again turning things upside down and revising how things are done. Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is telling the Gentiles that they belong long before they learn how to behave or before they learn what to believe. The Gentiles were eager to hear the word of God and to be a part of a faith community. But God is not limited to the willing and curious. At that Promise Keeper's event in Denver, Jesus interrupted and invited me to pay attention to the plans that He had for me. Even though I was a little less than willing initially, that was not a barrier to God accomplishing what He wanted to accomplish in my life. If God takes aim at someone and goes to work in their lives, there is little that can stop the work of God.

As we close today, I wonder, if we in the church are Peter in this story, who are the Gentiles of our community today? Who are the ones that God is calling that we are maybe not even aware of? And lastly, how is God already planning to use each of us to help others belong to the body of Christ? Let us pray.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve

- 1) Jesus modeled welcome and belonging. With what group or population could you improve your welcoming and sense of belonging?
- 2) God calls us all to share the story of faith. Pray for an opportunity this week to share your story of faith with a seeker or nonbeliever.
- 3) Who are the Gentiles of our community? How can you be Peter to them, serving them as a way to build fellowship and a sense of belonging?