

Ann Shultz

Sermon on Acts 10:44-48

May 9, 2021 ~ ADLC

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Of course, life is full of changes. If you all are anything like me, I only like change when it is my idea – and even then, I reserve the right to change my mind! One thing that that is almost always

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This morning's Acts passage takes place just after Peter has experienced one of these anvil-type transformational experiences. Peter had believed and taught that you could not be a follower of Jesus unless you were Jewish first. He avoided unclean foods and situations. He knew that he was part of God's chosen people and that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah. Peter believed that you could not be baptized and receive the Holy Spirit unless you were Jewish first.

But the Holy Spirit had other ideas.

In the town of Caesarea lived a man named Cornelius. Cornelius was a Gentile and a Roman Centurion. He may have even driven one of those four foot eight-and-a-half-inch wide war chariots that made the first road ruts. He was known as a good man who prayed often to God and cared for the poor. One afternoon in prayer, Cornelius had a vision. In this vision, an angel instructed him to send for Peter. After the angel left, Cornelius called two of his slaves, and a devout soldier who served under him. After telling them about his vision, he sent them out to fetch Peter.

Meanwhile, in the nearby town of Joppa, Peter also had a vision during his afternoon prayers. He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. Then he heard a voice saying, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat." But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean." The voice said to him again, a second time, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven.

Now Peter was quite puzzled by this vision, but before he had time to reflect upon what he had seen, the visitors sent by Cornelius arrived. The Spirit told Peter, "I have sent these

visitors to you. Get up and go with them." Peter obeys and goes with them to the home of Cornelius. But before they leave, they have a meal together ~ breaking the Jewish law that prohibited Jews from eating with Gentiles.

When Peter arrived at Cornelious's house, he found that many were gathered there to listen to Peter speak. He began to speak to those gathered there saying, "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to God."

While Peter was speaking, the Holy Spirit descended upon all who heard the word. The Jewish believers who came with Peter were astounded to see the gift of the Holy Spirit being poured out on the Gentiles. The Holy Spirit leapt over boundaries, breaking not only old laws and traditions, but breaking the boundaries that separated people. The resurrection of Jesus meant that even the boundary of death had been broken and all who believe in Jesus receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life. This means God's grace, blessing, and presence are available to absolutely anybody!

Who would we be astonished to see the Holy Spirit descend upon? Maybe that woman who has given birth to five drug affected babies and is pregnant with number six? Or perhaps that homeless man who has been begging on the same street corner for years? How about the convict who was just released from prison? Or the refugee family whose language and customs we don't understand. Perhaps it would be the misfit that no one talks to and has withdrawn into their home alone.

The Holy Spirit is a wild, unruly force who has no regard for human made rules and boundaries. As followers of Jesus, we are called to demonstrate this unruly, boundary-breaking love to those whom the world excludes.

Peter was no stranger to anvil-style change and transformation. Prior to this experience Peter and his colleagues were resistant to allowing the inclusion of Cornelous and his household. Now, following this divine intervention, he must return to his community and admit that he was wrong to exclude and share what God has taught him through the Holy Spirit. Like the waters of baptism that can not be contained, God's love permeates and overflows any attempt to limit its growth.

The Holy Spirit seldom holds still. She arrives without warning in surprising and unexpected places, and without regard to the conventions of organized religion. She continues to intervene in our lives and helps guide us in widening the circle of God's love and joy.

This morning, I invite you to close your eyes and picture our church and the community it serves. Take a moment to listen to that still, small voice. What might the Holy Spirit be calling you to do? Where is she leading us as a church community? What rules or boundaries need to be broken or changed? How can we work together to be the change and blessing the world needs?

May the Lord Jesus Christ give us the energy and imagination to keep up with the outward movements of the Holy Spirit.



Ann Shultz

Sermon on Acts 10:44-48

May 9, 2021 ~ ADLC

Did you know that in the United States, the standard distance between railroad rails is four feet, eight-and-a-half inches?

Why is it such an odd number? Legend has it that it is because that's the way they built them in England, and American railroads were designed by British immigrants.

Why did the English adopt that particular gauge? Because the people who built the pre-railroad tramways used that gauge.

They in turn were locked into that gauge because the people who built tramways used the same standards and tools they had used for building wagons, which were set on a gauge of four feet, eight-and-a-half inches.

Why were wagons built to that scale? Because with any other size, the wheels did not match the old wheel ruts that were on the roads.

So who built these old rutted roads?

The first long-distance highways in Europe were built by Imperial Rome for the benefit of their legions. The roads have been in use ever since. The ruts were first made by Roman war chariots. Four feet, eight-and-a-half inches was the width a chariot needed to be to accommodate the rear ends of two war horses.

Maybe "because we have always done it that way" isn't the best reason to continue doing something in the same way.

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true – is that even good changes come with stress and anxiety. I like to think of life’s changes as coming in two forms ~ the first being a slow change with a happy ending – like a caterpillar building its chrysalis and eventually emerging as a beautiful butterfly. The second kind of change is more like an anvil being dropped on one’s head like in the old Bugs Bunny and Roadrunner cartoons. It is sudden, surprising, frequently unwanted, and almost always transformative.

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