

May 6, 2018
Easter 6B
Acts 10: 44-48

The Holy Spirit Falls Upon Us

In the name of God; the Creator, the Redeemer, the Sustainer. Amen.

Does anyone come from a family that interrupts a lot?

Sometimes I think it's a cultural thing and other times it's just habit.
I was listening to a podcast the other day when the interviewer apologized for interrupting the man, she was interviewing, and he replied,
"it's okay. I'm Italian and we interrupt each other all the time."
Maybe your family is like that too.

In my last work environment, a small group of us had worked together so closely and for so long that we could almost finish each other's sentences.

It was a little weird.

And, we interrupted each other all the time.

It probably wasn't the healthiest, but we just got so excited about what we were talking about and planning that we all got to talking at once and started cutting each other off.
You know what I mean?

There's some of that going on in today's text from Acts.

And remember, the book of Acts is telling the story of the continuing acts of God through the resurrected Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

God continues to act in the world, even NOW,
through the resurrected Jesus AND through the Holy Spirit.

In today's bit of the story, we are entering the narrative mid-stream and Peter has been preaching for a while.

He is proclaiming the good news of God in Christ to the Gentiles when **the Holy Spirit interrupts him!** I love it!

What a great thing to have happen.

Peter is just getting warmed up.

He's mid-sermon, probably one of those two-hour fire and brimstone kind of sermons, not the reserved, stick-to-a-script 10-12 minute sermons we preach in the Episcopal Church.

Anyway, Peter is still going when the Holy Spirit interrupts him and falls upon all who heard the word.

Makes you wonder what happens next, right?

The text tells us that the circumcised believers who had come with Peter, that's code for the Jewish-now-Christian folks who had followed him from Joppa, were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles,
for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God.

Now, wait a minute. The Holy Spirit interrupts Peter's sermon and falls upon those who are hearing the good news.

This is the startling part.

The good news – the word of God – is for everyone.

Sermon: The Rev. Kate E. Wesch, May 6, 2018

The Holy Spirit is for all who believe whether they are Jew or Gentile,
black or white, old or young, homeless or housed,
single or partnered, parent or not, unemployed or working,
addicted or clean, you get the idea.

God's work and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is for all.

God shows no partiality.

Today's message is about bearing witness and sharing the good news of JESUS.

This makes sense up here (heads), but does it make sense down here (hearts)?

We live in a world FULL of boundaries.

We have fences and property lines.

We have "no trespassing" signs.

Playing games, you can be *out of bounds*.

Swimming pools have floating ropes to keep people where they belong.

Grocery stores have lines and ropes.

Waiting rooms have similar systems.

There are railroad tracks separating the good side of town from the bad.

And here, especially in the Northwest, we have bridges, rivers, lakes, mountains,
and roadways dividing up neighborhoods, cities, and land.

There are borders both visible and invisible,

like the Peace Arch at the Canadian border up north

or the old red line borders which left such a mark on our city out of our racist history.

Borders and boundaries tell a story.

They **segregate and reinforce identity**

by showing how we are alike and how we are different.

For the two peoples thrust together in this story,

the Gentiles of Caesarea and the Jewish Christians with Peter,

they had many things in common AND a great many ways in which they were different.

One group still kept kosher and ate only certain foods.

They were circumcised.

They followed particular purity rituals and prayed a certain way.

While the Gentiles kept drastically different customs,

eating different foods and not being circumcised.

The Holy Spirit turns life upside down for BOTH groups

when she interrupts and overflows, filling both with the Spirit.

Cornelius and the Gentiles are even baptized by the end of it.

While it is tempting to make this story all about Peter and Cornelius,

this passage is primarily about the Holy Spirit.

That follows since the entire book of the Bible

is telling us the story of the of the continuing acts of God
through the resurrected Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

To quote William Willimon,

"It is about the Holy Spirit and how the Spirit's purposes are accomplished
in spite of the boundaries constructed by humans."

What we see is the inner circle widening.

**The Holy Spirit arrives on the scene pushing the boundaries out further and further
and further until everyone is welcomed into God's Kingdom.**

The Holy Spirit is not bound by limitations or borders or restrictions.

She is given freely.

Today, the wounds of exclusion run deep in our culture and in our church.

The number of **uncrossed boundaries** are sinful and include:

racism, sexism, classism, ageism, nationalism, heterosexism,
the list could go on and on.

The borders and boundaries of our hearts are sinful arrogance and pride

when we set up a paradigm of us vs. them

and build walls around the kingdoms of our own making
instead of seeking the kingdom of God.

Peter and Cornelius couldn't cross the border on their own,

but the Holy Spirit empowered them to move from their segregated places
into a shared opportunity of grace.

The Holy Spirit broke the barriers and propelled the witnesses beyond, beyond the borders,
beyond the kingdoms of their own making and out into the world.

Bill Countryman, in his book *Living on the Border of the Holy*,

says we live in this border land as people of faith.

We are boundary crossers by our calling.

We live in the border land between the physical, material world we are so accustomed to,
and the greater spiritual reality that surrounds us at all times and in all places.

I would call this the Kingdom of God.

He writes about this border country we live in saying:

"It is a country in which, at privileged moments of access,
we find ourselves looking over from the everyday world into another,
into a world that undergirds the everyday world,
limits it, defines it, gives it coherence and meaning, drives it.

Yet this hidden world is not another world, but the familiar world discovered afresh.

It is the everyday world seen at new depth, with new comprehension....

In the border country one discovers connection, roots, limits, meaning.

To live there for a while is like having veils pulled away.

In the long run we find that the border country is in fact the place we have always lived,
but it is seen in a new and clearer light."

Living in this border land,

moving between the Kingdom of Earth and the Kingdom of God
is our calling as Christians

AND Countryman does a nice job of describing
the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

It doesn't turn us into different people.

We don't leave this place and get beamed up somewhere else entirely.

Rather, like the people in Cornelius' and Peter's day,

we continue living our lives and they are infused with something new,

"the familiar world discovered afresh,
the everyday world seen at new depth, with new comprehension."

That is the Holy Spirit fallen upon us.

Watch for her to interrupt you.

For it will happen in the most surprising and unexpected ways.