

Sermon Easter 6B
May 5, 2024
sylvia@stmarksabq.org

Intro:

Challenging to take risks, cross boundaries, connect with others.

Most people have some difficulty crossing boundaries to connect across difference: Generation, Race, Class, Gender, Political or Religious or Cultural Affiliation

Our Youth know very particular challenges when it comes to connecting across differences...

I have difficulty crossing boundaries to connect with ANYONE I don't already know. Period.

Almerine-Godly Play

In order to overcome our fear and resistance to crossing boundaries to connect: We need God's help—and a vision—a dream—a hope—of a future that is even more compelling than our Fear

This, it turns out is God's speciality. Especially in Acts.

The Holy Spirit grants God's People Dreams and Visions; Power and Love they need to Take Risks, Cross Boundaries, Connect with Others—so that God's New Community of Love continues to grow

Acts 10

Part 1: VISION: Cornelius (Gentile) in Caesarea has a VISION that prompts an INVITATION

*In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort, as it was called. He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God. **One afternoon***

at about three o'clock he had a vision in which he clearly saw an angel of God coming in and saying to him, 'Cornelius.' He stared at him in terror and said, 'What is it, Lord?' He answered, 'Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. Now send men to Joppa for a certain Simon who is called Peter; he is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside.' When the angel who spoke to him had left, he called two of his slaves and a devout soldier from the ranks of those who served him, and after telling them everything, he sent them to Joppa.

God grants Cornelius a Vision/Dream that empowers him to issue an unexpected INVITATION

Part II: VISION: Peter (Jew) is in Joppa has a VISION that enables his RESPONSE

About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance. 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 while Peter was greatly puzzled about what to make of the vision that he had seen, suddenly the men sent by Cornelius appeared...They were asking for Simon's house and were standing by the gate. They called out to ask whether Simon, who was called Peter, was staying there. While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Look, three men are searching for you. Now get up, go down, and go with them without hesitation; for I have sent them.' So Peter went down to the men and said, 'I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for your coming?' They answered, 'Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say.' So Peter invited them in and gave them lodging. The next

day he got up and went with them, and some of the believers from Joppa accompanied him.

God grants Peter a Vision that empowers him to ACCEPT an unexpected invitation from an UNLIKELY “other”

Part III: The Encounter: Sharing and Listening

The next day Peter arrives in **Caesarea**, and goes to the house of Cornelius...clarify the purpose of their encounter.

[Peter begins] “You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without objection. Now may I ask why you sent for me?”

Cornelius replied [I had a vision of an angel who told me to call for you], ‘Four days ago at this very hour, at three o’clock, I was praying in my house when suddenly a man in dazzling clothes stood before me. He said, “Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon, who is called Peter; he is staying in the home of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.” Therefore I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. So now all of us are here in the presence of God to listen to all that the Lord has commanded you to say.’

Then Peter began to speak to them....

Cornelius Invites Peter to meet with him, and share his story. Peter Accepts the Invitation. He comes. He shares. And Cornelius listens attentively to what he has to say.

That’s where today’s reading picks up. We’ll call this Finale:

Part 4: The Surprise

Then Peter began to speak to them.... Peter is sharing his story—the story of his own lived experience of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus, and then the text tells us:

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word.

***While Peter was still speaking* the Holy Spirit shows up!!!!**

Friends—maybe this is the point of talking with strangers. And this is the point of listening, too. I think this is absolutely the point of St. Mark’s annual “Summer of Conversation”. The point of taking risks and leaving our comfort zones to act in obedience to the Vision God gives us...the point of crossing boundaries and connecting with others... of making and accepting unexpected invitations...of sharing our stories and listening deeply while others share theirs. Because, as today’s reading reminds us, it is *while* we are sharing and *while* we are listening—especially with someone very different from ourselves—that the Holy Spirit is poured out.

It is fair to say that we should *expect* the Holy Spirit to show up as a “surprise guest” in every “one-on-one” conversation!!!

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word.

In the midst of conversation—in that moment where deep sharing and deep listening converge, God SHOWS UP.

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

God SHOWS UP, and God SURPRISES us by being present and acting in the most unexpected people and places and ways.

Then Peter said, "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?"

God SHOWS UP, and GOD SURPRISES us by the BREADTH of God's Presence and the DEPTH of God's Action. God EXPANDS our vision of what is possible, and God ENLARGES and our community of belonging.

Conclusion: Summer of Conversation

As we embark on our Summer of Conversation, I invite you to remember and return to Acts Chapter 10. Let it be your inspiration, your hope, and your guide.

Step 1: **Vision**—compels an invitation

Step 2: **Vision**—compels a response

Step 3: **Encounter**—sharing and listening

Step 4: **Surprise**—While we are still speaking...The Holy Spirit Shows Up!

I wonder....

What Vision is God giving you Today?

Will that Vision empower you to Invite a Connection?

Will that Vision empower you to Accept an Invitation?

Will you Meet another person where they're at?

Will you Share your story?

Will you Listen to theirs?

Are you ready for God's Spirit to interrupt and surprise you?

Are you ready for your vision of God to expand?

Are you ready for your community of belonging to grow?