

Message for Sunday, October 25, 2026

Scripture: Acts 10: 44-48 NRSVue

Title: Unlimited

Welcome

Announcements:

Giving Options: online, QR code, offering plate; Special Offering for October wraps up this weekend as World Communion Sunday (explainer video), Special Offering for November will be Frontera de Cristo (starting next week there will be a 2-minute explainer video); Interfaith Classes start today at 2PM. In the Fellowship Hall. The topic is Buddhism; All Saints Day name dedication. Please call the church office if you have a name you wish shared. Church Conference will be on November 15th, 2026 at 5PM. SPRC will meet at 4PM in Pastor Jonathan's office.

Fellowship of Love

Song

Call to Worship

L: Come to us, O God.

A: Breathe through our worship with your Holy Spirit.

L: Fill us with your faithful love.

A: Guide us with your ancient teachings.

L: Come to us, O God.

A: Be in our prayer and praise.

Unison Prayer

God of ages past and days to come, help us embrace both your ancient wisdom and your ongoing guidance.

Help us hear anew your words from years gone by.

Open our hearts and minds to fully to fully embrace what it means to love you, to love ourselves, and to love our neighbors as you have loved us.

In love and gratitude, we pray. Amen.

L: As we come to this time of offering, let us remember that giving is an opportunity to respond to God's generosity with our own.

Offering/Song

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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.

Message: Unlimited

I spend a significant amount of time thinking about my limitations. I don't mean this as a criticism or even a reflection of my mental health. What I mean by this is that I think about the things I don't know, and think about the capabilities that I have. I think about the limitations of working two jobs and balancing two schedules. The limitations of my understanding of the mysteries of the universe, how I understand how black holes are formed and the scope of black holes, but also in how I don't feel I really understand black holes at all, and I will never experience looking at one directly...thankfully.

When I was working on my schooling with Aberdeen I came across a theological school of thought for talking about disabilities called “limits” theory. This idea is that what we consider “normal” or “not disabled” really is just a short-term status if it exists at all. That we as humans are really defined by the limits we have set in place in our lives. For this outlook it is particularly talking about physical limits, for instance none of us can physically fly. Not being able to fly is not considered a disability, instead it is considered a limit. This thought then turns towards disability to say that as humans on this earth we all experience limits to who we are.

As a theological outlook I think there are some problems with this line of thought. Perhaps my biggest issue is that it takes a more quantitative approach to things as opposed to a qualitative approach. What I mean by that it is it seems to talk about our limits as a whole as opposed to how some limits are greater than other limits. This is part of the issue in today's passage. This passage is about limits, but it is about the quality of the limits as opposed to the quantity of the limits.

This section of verses is a very narrow slice of a longer story. This story is the story of Cornelius and his conversion, baptism, and anointing by the spirit of God. At every step in this

story Peter is dragging his feet. Peter is not the hero of this story. If anything, Peter is the antagonist. Conceptually Peter is not initially ready for what he says in these verses we read today, instead these verses are the culmination of the story.

Cornelius is a Roman Centurion. In simplified terms he is important in the Roman military. He even owns a house in the governmental center of the area, Caesarea. This is a well-connected, wealthy, important individual. No longer is Christianity operating at the fringe of the empire, this is the first steps into the heart of the Roman empire, and Peter is not ready for it.

Peter is approaching God as a limited resource. God is the God of the people of Israel. Sure by this point in the story we have the Ethiopian eunuch has been converted, and as I spoke a few weeks ago we had the conversion of some Samaritans. These individuals still have some religious connection to the Jewish people, and their conversion wasn't a step into the empire. But a high up Roman official, well that's something completely different and something that Peter, and by extension us are not ready for.

Historically the people of God have always had a tense relationship with the spirit of God. I know this is not a story we like to tell but we tend to put limits on God, and not accept that we follow a God who is without limits. But pastor, we are talking about the spirit of God moving! How can anyone stand in the way of that? Well let me give you some examples.

One of the more recent historical examples comes from the Azusa Street Revival. This is seen as the birth place of Pentecostalism as a movement. Whether you agree with Pentecostalism or not is not actually the point. One thing I think everyone can agree on is that Pentecostalism as a movement has significantly shaped religious discourse in the United States over the past 100 years. At the Azusa Street Revival, the spirit of God was moving, people were experiencing that spirit, and what happened? Some white ministers didn't like that black people were worshipping with them and experiencing the same spirit of God. This led to a racial split of Pentecostalism because the original people involved couldn't see God at work in a multi-racial setting.

Now we have our own skeletons in the closet with this. In the Methodist Church we segregated along racial lines because the church couldn't stand to see black members come and take communion at the same kneeling rail as the white parishioners. The spirit can't be moving among those types of people. This isn't just a racial thing; in the early Methodist movement the Church of England would not accept what John Wesley was doing and refused him a pulpit to preach in. So what did he do? He preached standing on his father's grave stone to crowds larger than the church would hold.

This happens with women leaders and women preachers. In the past two weeks I've been helping someone navigate an argument with people about whether women can be teachers in

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the church or not. We know that the spirit of God prefers men doesn't it?...I mean the bible says women can't be pastors so it must be true? That is until you look for where it names male pastors...you won't find a single one named.

More recently the split over full LGBT inclusion in the Methodist Church is another example. While people have all sorts of things to say about it, the ending question is "is the spirit of God at work in people who are LGBT?" The reality is you cannot put limits on that question- because there are plenty of examples of all kinds of people who the spirit of God is working in.

Our desire is often to limit God, but this passage teaches us that God is not limited by our limits. Every example I gave you are examples that have had to be overcome. That we, along with Peter have to learn to look for the work of God, the unlimited spirit of God being shared as opposed to our narrow definition of who God can be working through. In each of these examples you may see yourself and you may be struggling with coming to grips with a different reality about it. But I'll tell you this; if God's spirit wasn't unlimited I myself would not be up here. I don't know a single person that deserves to be a Pastor, much less a Bishop. No one is good enough, no one knows enough, no one has few enough flaws. Instead all of us rely on the unlimited spirit of God.

Gods spirit is unlimited. Let's not limit it in how it works in others or in how it may be at work in ourselves. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer/Pastoral Prayer

Song

Benediction

Song

Goodbye