



The Westminster Pulpit

Sermons Preached at Westminster Presbyterian Church
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“When It Falls On You” **Sermon on Acts 10:44-48**

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It's Mother's Day! Flowers purchased. Check. Reservation for brunch made. Check. Remembering to say, "Happy Mother's Day!". Check. Remembering to put Mother's Day in the sermon. Check!

The trouble with taking on responsibility is that it all falls on you. You're the one who makes the checklist. You're the one who checks things off. You're the one holding it together. You're the one who has to fix what is broken, and if you don't, no one else will. It all falls on you, which leads me to our text and to Peter.

Peter, the fisherman, answered the call, "Follow me." He had no idea what he was getting himself into. How amazing that he should witness the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead raised, and the poor having good news proclaimed to them. Peter got to see it all. It was quite a ride, but then - cross, tomb, resurrection. And I have to wonder if Peter didn't think it all fell on him.

Imagine - he has witnessed the greatest story - and now he has to tell it. He can't just put Jesus in the rearview mirror and wonder, "Now what?" No. The call of the resurrected Lord has fallen on Peter. The Holy Spirit has fallen on Peter.

We read from Acts, chapter 10. An amazing chapter! A revolutionary chapter! In it, God is trying to persuade Peter, through a vision, that it's okay for him to eat a sausage, egg, and cheese sandwich. You remember. Peter has the vision of sheet coming down from the heavens filled with all the animals Peter knew to be unclean. And a voice said, "Eat!" Peter said, "No." "Eat." "No." "Eat." "No." And about that same time, Peter hears

a knock on the door; it's three guys, who say he needs to go preach to a Roman Centurion named Cornelius. He meets Cornelius and his entourage, and this is what happens next:

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.

It all fell on Peter. Is he going to move past what he knew to be right? "Eat." "No" "Eat." "No." "Eat." "No." It all fell on Peter to venture into what he thought was an unclean world. It all fell on Peter to put aside his politics and go preach to a Roman Centurion.

Romans! They are the people who have invaded his country, and forced his people to pay taxes to a man who thinks he's God. Romans are all arrogance, muscle, and might. It falls on Peter to throw out a life preserver to the last person on earth worthy of salvation.

Do you think God might be telling us to pay attention? We are not allowed to be choosy in holding back God's Good News.

Peter found that out. Peter meets that Roman and his little tribe, and Peter starts preaching. He may have been up all night crafting a sermon with three points and a killer poem. But the Spirit apparently is not Presbyterian. The Spirit didn't have the courtesy to do things decently and in order. The Spirit interrupts! Interrupts the sermon! And falls on those Romans. Those Romans! And Peter looks at it all, and it lands on Peter to discern that God is opening the world up, the whole blessed creation for Good News. It falls on Peter to make the call. "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?"

If you were in that room, it would have fallen on you to raise your hand and say, "I can". If you're asking for votes, I'd vote to prevent it. I mean, how can we trust these people? Don't you think we need to give them some time? Let's see if there is some real faith to follow. Let's see if they change. Let's see if they stand up for us. Let's see if they will make pledge and then look at their end of year contribution. Let's form a committee to look into this. We don't need to rush. This Christianity thing is just starting out, let's not move too quickly. It could all fall apart. "Surely we can form a committee."

Peter asked, "Who can prevent these people from being baptized?"

Not one raised a hand. Not one. One of the most controversial Acts of the Apostles and not one tried to prevent the waters of baptism.

Do you have any idea why that would happen? Everyone in agreement. We live in a world where people will object to everything and anything and a unanimous vote on anything would surely be a sign of the apocalypse.

“Who can prevent these people from being baptized?”

Have you ever had the Spirit of God fall on you? Have you ever had that moment when suddenly you realized that what was wrong with you is that you were dehydrated? That you were thirsty and the very thing your soul has been thirsting, is pouring down on you?

Last Saturday, I showed up for FaithWorks at the church. I look forward to FaithWorks because it gives me a chance to break out my Dickies stonewashed overalls. We had a good turnout, and I'm grateful for Fran and Amy who decided it was time to do some good as a congregation. Outdoors.

Well, we all got in our cars and went out to our nonprofits. I was sent out to Cul2vate; it's a nonprofit that, when you arrive, you see a small farm. That's what it looks like. Tractor, shed, fields with the things of green popping up out of the soil. I kind of stand out on a Sunday morning, but there in my Dickies stonewashed overalls, I just blended in. It's a farm!

It's a farm that grows food to feed people. Hungry people. You and I qualify as hungry people, and if you've ever eaten, say, at Tazikis, you probably had a tomato or some lettuce from the Cul2vate farm. They grow food, but it's also about growing people. Giving people a second chance.

One of the guys who I worked with on the farm, Chris, had been addicted to meth. He was in prison. I just found that out yesterday. I never guessed that when I was working with him. I figured he was a guy who got a degree in agriculture and was putting it to good work at a non-profit. A gentle Spirit of a man.

But yesterday, when I was looking online at the Cul2vate staff page, I noticed he had his story there. Addicted as a young man to meth, he went to prison. In prison he broke down, and said a long shot “Hail Mary” prayer to God. He said, “It's kind of an uncool thing to do in prison, but it saved my life.” Do you believe that could happen? A “Hail Mary” prayer, a last gasp, and it could turn your life around? Sounds like something from the Book of Acts.

I showed up at Cult2vate with the rest of the Westminster entourage and Joey, the Executive Director, who is about as Tennessee country in look and sound, singled me out of the crowd. He called me Farmer Drake and mentioned my overalls. I said,

“I’m fitting in with this farm.” He singled me out, not because of that, but because I thought he was speaking just to me.

He was telling stories straight from the Book of Acts. He told a story about the flood that happened in March of this year, how it just swept right through the farm. And how he was power washing the shed, and how this “Dude” as he called him, pulled up in a pick-up truck, hauled out a power washer and just joined in. After some time, they shut them off and Joey said, “I appreciate you helping out. What brought you down here?” And the Dude said, “I’ve been an alcoholic for some 20 years, and something just told me that I needed to come down here and stop drinking and…” And Joey said, “I wouldn’t be surprised if God sent this flood just for you. So that you could come down here and God could save your life.”

At that moment, I could have raised my hand and made an objection, questioning how such a statement could hold up theologically. But I didn’t raise my hand. I didn’t realize how thirsty I was for some Good News.

“If it means saving your life, I hope God would send a flood every day.” Do you hear the love in that?

The Spirit of God was falling on me. Story after story of people who were just dried out, rocky soil, hard path, choked by weeds, but the Word of God and the Spirit falls on them, and look what grows but a harvest 1,000-fold.

“Alright Farmer Drake,” Joey said to me. “I need your help.” And we walked out to a tractor. He put me on my knees behind a tractor, and I was holding some material and water line and he said, “Now hold on to it, and don’t let go of that water line. Don’t mess this up.” I said, “Apparently it doesn’t matter if I mess it up here or not, because God’s going to fix it anyway.” “Ha,” he said, “You got that right!”

You know better than anyone all the demands that are falling on you right now. You know better than anyone. You may not know, however, how thirsty you are. Hear again, that God wants nothing more than to send a Spirit to fall on you. Hear again that God loves you. Hear again that God will save your life. Hear again the sound of the waters of your baptism.