

**Sermon: “Anointed, Ordained, Equipped”**

**Text: Acts 10:34 – Acts 11:18; Matthew 3:13-17**

**Date: January 13, 2008 (Baptism of the Lord Sunday; Ordination of Officers)**

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Peter has been “called on the carpet.” He has been “called on the carpet” by his fellow church leaders. “For what?” you might ask.

He officiated at or “ordered” the baptism of a guy named Cornelius and some others. Sure sounds innocent enough. What’s the big deal?

At least three things made this a big deal. You see, Cornelius wasn’t exactly “church member material.” (from “The God Who Shows No Partiality” sermon by The Reverend Dr. Mark Smutny, Pasadena Presbyterian Church).

First, Cornelius was a Gentile—a non-Jew. “Cornelius’ baptism divided the church because until that time the church’s membership was entirely Jewish. The earliest church was made up of faithful Jews who tried to keep all the commandments that God had given to Israel and who also believed Jesus was the Messiah” (from “The God Who Shows No Partiality” sermon by The Rev. Dr. Mark Smutny, Pasadena Presbyterian Church). There remained a belief among these early believers that the church was for them, not the Gentiles.

Second, Cornelius was a Roman. The Romans were oppressors of the Jews. They were the enemy.

Third, Cornelius was a Roman soldier. Not only was he Roman but he was also an enforcer of the Roman’s policies. He was an enemy.

Perhaps you’re still saying: “What’s the big deal?”

Imagine this: The United States is occupied by the army of an enemy nation. These enemies oppress our citizens, limit our freedoms, and do things that are insensitive and offensive to the religious beliefs of our particular church—our beliefs here at Denbigh Presbyterian Church. Try to imagine the feelings you might have about the enforcers—the soldiers.

Then imagine this: One of these enemy soldiers comes to believe in the Gospel by the work of the Holy Spirit and the witness of one of our church leaders. This church leader had come to the realization through the Holy Spirit that even the enemy soldier was a child of God and should be welcomed here at Denbigh Presbyterian Church. This becomes especially

clear when the Holy Spirit falls upon that enemy soldier just like He had fallen up on that church leader before. The church leader loses his head, accidentally forgets church rules and baptizes that soldier right on the spot. Right then and there he welcomes this new convert to Christianity—an enemy, a person formerly of another faith, a foreigner.

Before long this goes through the church grapevine. Parking lot meetings are held. E-mails are sent. This leader is called before the Session. He is called on the carpet. As Ricky Ricardo would put it: “You got some ‘splainin’ to do.”

It’s apparent that the Holy Spirit doesn’t seem to follow our rules, expectations or even our desires. In our first reading for today (Matthew 3:13-17), we hear of another unusual baptism—the baptism of Jesus. Why would Jesus need to be baptized? He was sinless. He was God.

The baptism of Jesus marked the beginning of his public ministry. In his baptism he was publicly acknowledged and set apart for his ministry—a ministry which would lead him to the cross. Jesus was also baptized in order to demonstrate his identification with humanity. He was fully human, yet without sin. He showed us the way by leading the way to the waters of baptism. At Jesus’ baptism the Holy Spirit fell upon him. In his baptism Jesus was publicly anointed, ordained and equipped by the Holy Spirit for his ministry.

But why John the Baptist as the baptizer of Jesus? John himself questions his role? Should things be the other way around? It didn’t make sense.

Peter relates in his statement of faith before the other church leaders how Jesus was baptized, then went on to minister to ALL people. Went around doing good and healing all under the power of the devil because God was with him. The scandal of the gospel for the Jews was that Gentiles—all people—were welcomed and embraced by Jesus. The gospels relate to us that Jesus always had lots of ‘splainin’ to do on this subject.

Jesus’ baptism and his ministry showed over and over again that God doesn’t always follow our rules, expectation and desires.

As we return to the text in Acts about Peter we recall that Peter was one who proved that the Spirit works in mysterious ways. Peter was an unlikely candidate for apostleship to start with—not really “church leader material.” Then, when the Holy Spirit doesn’t play by Peter’s “rules” and speaks to Peter in a trance about God’s impartiality, falls upon the Gentile Roman Soldier Cornelius and leads Peter to baptize and welcome “unlikely

church material” like Cornelius, Peter’s leadership is questioned. Yet Peter—unlikely church leader material—is anointed, ordained and equipped for ministry. Peter, like Jesus, had lots of explaining to do throughout his ministry—especially when the Holy Spirit defied the norms and expectations of the early church and its leaders. I suppose Cornelius had lots of explaining to do, too. After all, he was not considered “church material” yet at his baptism he was anointed, ordained and equipped for ministry.

What does any of this have to do with us? As we look around at one another we can sure see that Holy Spirit doesn’t always play by our rules, expectations and desires. In all honesty, who among us is really church member material much less church leader material? We’re all broken, we’re all sinful, and we all struggle with our prejudices and narrow views of what the church is supposed to be. Yet the Holy Spirit has surprised us. The Holy Spirit has fallen upon us—unlikely candidates. The Holy Spirit has anointed, ordained and equipped each one of us for ministry. And the Holy Spirit has set apart some for particular ministries in the church, anointing, ordaining and equipping us for those particular ministries.

The Church of Jesus Christ still struggles with the revelation that came to Peter centuries ago: “God shows no partiality.” The Holy Spirit is still in the business of “shaking the church” from its preconceived notions and prejudices. But whenever we respond in obedience to the Holy Spirit, there will be “splainin” to do.

I think Peter serves as a good role model for us when we may be “called on the carpet.” First, he agreed to explain. He told his story, including his own statement of faith, with courage and in such a way that others could and did hear. He boldly asserted what he had grown to believe: “If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?” Peter was faithful even when there was explaining to do.

The Holy Spirit has anointed, ordained and equipped each of us for ministry. May we remember in our ministries that “God shows no partiality.” May we be open to the surprises the Holy Spirit will bring our way, as the Spirit continues to shake the church.