Rule’s Beethoven prelude this morning is powerful. The lilt-like melody carries you along, much like life has a way of doing and then you hear the heavy, dramatic tones of change, the rumble of possible thunder evoking a threat of fear to your mind, and then without any warning, you hear the soft lilting melody return, soothing you into a normal pattern of life again. You exhale and breathe easier, and think, ahh, life is back to normal. Life is good.

We have all experienced this rhythm to our lives? There are the ups and downs of life, and if you live long enough, you learn that our very character is carved out in the ordinary parts of living. We have all, more than likely, felt extreme joy, and we have probably felt extreme physical or mental pain, if we our honest with our feelings, because unless you have lived in a bubble of sorts, life is full of highs and lows, and everything in between.

From our life experience we gain one insight, though, we never really return to the place we once were. Life moves on for us all, and sometimes we move with it, and sometimes change becomes too difficult, and we stay on pause because we can’t change. I have great empathy for the early Christians, who called themselves followers of the way, because they lived during a time of dramatic change; a change causing so much pain and confusion that I wonder how the story of Jesus even survived. These men and women were truly heroes, and without the Holy Spirit working in their lives it is doubtful they would have stayed committed to following Jesus.

The disciples and other people who became followers of Jesus lived during a time of total chaos, and I mean this, literally. Their worlds had been turned upside down economically, physically, mentally, and spiritually as they strived to grasp what being a follower of Jesus meant for their lives. If you were a Jew who became a Jesus follower, you were given your eviction notice by the Jewish religious leaders. The Acts of the Apostles was written following the destruction of the Jewish temple, so the social unrest taking place in the lives of Jews living in Palestine would have been palpable. No one would have trusted anyone, especially, the newly added gentile believers who were also becoming followers of Jesus.

We labor under the assumption that we have experienced horrible political unrest the last few years, but the political unrest during the 1st and 2nd Century was daunting for the common person. Add common people who are now not following the Roman or Jewish guidelines and you have a recipe for rebellion. The followers of Jesus had a reason to fear for their lives.

We enter our story in the Acts of the Apostles today inside a storyline that actually begins in chapter 10:1, where a Centurion from Caesarea by the name of Cornelius requests that Peter come to his home. Peter was staying in the home of Simon, a tanner in the city of Joppa, around 40 miles away, but upon hearing this request, Simon gets up and leaves for Caesarea.

You might ask, why did Peter even go to a man in Caesarea who he did not know. Luke tells us, he listened to the Holy Spirit. Peter listened to the Holy Spirit because while he had been praying he had a vision of a large sheet being lowered to the ground, and he saw animals of all kind, and heard these words spoken three times, “Get up, Peter; kill and eat.” And Peter answers as I might answer if I had been a practicing Jew, “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean.” The voice said, “What God has made clean, you must not call profane.”

If we were listening to Rule’s prelude right now you would hear the rumble of the base notes moving the listener into a fearful space, and this is exactly what the Holy Spirit did to Peter. He moved Peter from a tradition of practiced taboos to an open space where God calls all things good. It’s easy to hear these Sunday school stories and keep them in a fantasy world of fiction, but there is a certain melodrama taking place, God is making change happen through revelation. God is using Peter to make revelation come alive. Big change is taking place, not only in the life of Peter, but in the lives of Jews and Gentiles alike. Jews and Gentiles who follow Jesus will now worship together, something, unthinkable during the early life of Peter.

There is much to learn from this story in the Acts of the Apostles, but there is one key ingredient we must pay attention to, and that key is to LISTEN. Peter has been taken up in an **EVENT OF LISTENING** that is nothing less than sacramental, through which he will hold up the body and blood of Jesus to all people, Jews and Gentiles. And this is the miracle in the listening process, Peter not only listens to God, he listens to a Gentile, a God-fearing man by the name of Cornelius. The revelation is that Peter, the religious leader, listens to someone outside his core friends and faith, and follows the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Nothing prepared Peter or the disciples for this kind of witness. And the disciples are given no hint on what God is up to as Peter responds to the request of Cornelius. While Peter acts, God moves. Our Acts reading says, “*While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. 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, for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God*.” The Holy Spirit has come on the Gentiles, and they speak in tongues along with the Jewish followers of Jesus.

And if you are a bit skeptical as I can be, you might be thinking, “Okay, this is a one-time event where the Gentiles experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit.” But if that is the case, why did Peter then stay with these new Gentile believers for several days. Prior to this event, there is no way Peter would have a stayed in the home of a Gentile. Gentiles were considered unclean, but now they were considered clean.

I wonder what Peter and the other disciples thought as they stayed with the Gentiles for a few days. A miracle of revelation had taken place, and turned the lives of Jews and Gentiles upside down. No longer would they turn away from each other, they would now join in communion with each other. They would love each other.

So does this reading have any relevance for us as followers of Jesus in the 21st Century? Who do we need to be listening to right now? Is our neighbor the Gentile we need to listen to? How will the Holy Spirit use the people of St. Paul’s to listen to people outside our faith tradition? Can we learn from our neighbors? According to the Acts of the Apostles, we are not only to listen, but we are to act.

In this Scripture lesson from Acts God overcomes boundary and border from a source called love. God overcomes church walls and our meek attitude toward evangelism, and says, “You are not in control of the Holy Spirit.” The power of the Holy Spirit moves and we merely need to act with love. We are to embrace our neighbor with no geographic boundaries. That neighbor can be the homeless, the immigrant, the LGBTQ, and the list is endless as it needs to be.

Do you know the neighbor who lives beside you? Do you know their needs enough to pray for them and bring their prayer requests before the members of St. Paul’s? The real miracle in this story is that Jews and Gentiles hung out together, in spite, of cultural and religious taboos. They felt the love among each other. Do we have the courage to LISTEN to our neighbor and act? Can we abide in love, so our love can be shared with all people? I hope so! Amen.