

A sermon “The Gospel that crosses every line”
From Acts 10:34-43 (RSVue)
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Delivered at Plymouth Presbyterian Church
St. Helens, Oregon
January 11, 2026

Baptism of the Lord Sunday usually points us to the Jordan River—to water, to Jesus, to the heavens opening. Today, instead of standing at the riverbank, we find ourselves in someone else’s house.

Peter is standing in the home of Cornelius—a Gentile, an outsider, someone Peter was raised to avoid. And what happens there reshapes everything the church thought it knew about baptism, belonging, and God’s grace.

Peter begins with a confession, not about sin, but about God: “*I truly understand that God shows no partiality.*”

That sentence is the turning point of the early church.

1. God’s Grace Is Wider Than We Expect

Peter didn’t arrive at Cornelius’s house because he was open-minded or courageous. He arrived because God pushed him there—through visions, interruptions, and the persistent work of the Spirit.

And standing there, Peter realizes something unsettling and freeing:
God has already been at work before the church arrived.

This is baptismal truth.

Baptism is not our declaration about God.

It is God’s declaration about us.

Before we believe correctly, before we behave properly, before we belong comfortably—God claims us. **This is the Gospel that crosses lines.**

That’s true for Cornelius.

That’s true for the Gentiles.

And it’s true for us. God’s grace is wider than we expect.

2. Baptism Changes How We See People

Peter retells the story of Jesus—his baptism, his ministry, his death, and his resurrection. And then something astonishing happens.

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

Peter doesn’t finish the sermon.

There’s no altar call.

No instruction class.

No conditions met.

God interrupts the sermon. God shouldn't do that – Peter may start over.

The Spirit falls on people Peter once believed were outside God's promise, outside of God's love. Baptism, then, is not just a personal comfort. It is a reorientation of our vision. **This is the Gospel that crosses lines.**

If God shows no partiality, the church cannot either.

If God pours out the Spirit freely, we cannot restrict grace.

If God welcomes first, we must learn to catch up. Baptism changes how we see people.

3. Baptism Sends Us Into a Wider World

At Jesus' baptism, God's voice declares, "You are my beloved."

In Acts 10, God declares that same belonging—without distinction.

Baptism is not the end of the journey.

It is the beginning of a life shaped by God's mercy.

Peter arrives thinking he is the one bringing God to Cornelius.

He leaves knowing God has already arrived.

That's the calling of the baptized church—not to control where God goes, but to recognize where God is already at work. **This is the Gospel that crosses every line.**

In 1947, Jackie Robinson became the first Black player in Major League Baseball with the Brooklyn Dodgers. The abuse was relentless—fans jeered, opposing players threatened him, and even teammates were uncertain how to respond.

During one game in Cincinnati, the insults grew especially cruel. Robinson stood alone at first base, absorbing it in silence.

Then **Pee Wee Reese**, the Brooklyn Dodgers' shortstop—a white Southerner—walked over, put his arm around Robinson's shoulder, and stood with him in front of the crowd.

He didn't say anything.

He didn't make a speech.

He simply stood there.

The crowd grew quieter. Something shifted.

Years later, Robinson said that moment may have saved his career.

This moment in baseball history mirrors Acts 10 in several key ways:

- Reese didn't *fix* the system—he **crossed a boundary**
- He didn't wait for approval—he **acted before permission**
- He didn't argue theology—he **embodied belonging**

What are we to do with this passage?

Acts 10 does not resolve every question the church wrestles with, and it doesn't ask us to pretend those questions don't exist. What it does ask is something deeper and more demanding. It asks whether we are willing to pay attention when God's Spirit is present in people we once kept at a distance.

For the church today, that matters as we think about our LGBTQI+ siblings in Christ—people who pray, serve, love Jesus, and bear the fruit of the Spirit. Acts 10 does not ask us to ignore Scripture or rush past discernment. But it does ask us to take seriously the evidence of God's grace in real lives, and to ask whether withholding welcome is faithful when God has already poured out the Spirit. Like Peter, we may discover that faithfulness sometimes means letting God widen our understanding of who belongs at the table.

That's what Peter learns in Cornelius's house.

God doesn't wait until the church is comfortable.

God moves toward the outsider **first**.

So on this Baptism of the Lord Sunday, we remember:

- God's grace is wider than our boundaries
- God's Spirit moves ahead of our understanding
- God's baptism claims us and sends us

And sometimes—thank God—the God's Spirit crosses every line while we are still speaking.
Amen.