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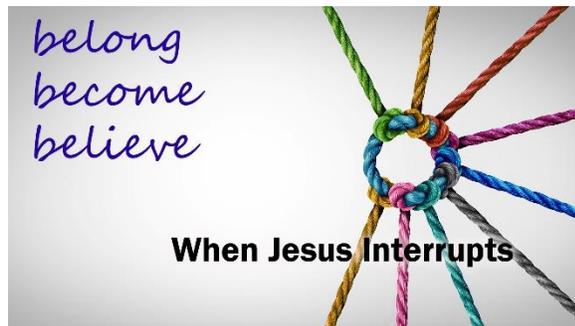
Title: Belong. Become. Believe. – When Jesus Interrupts

Preaching: Danny Gulden, Lead Pastor, Promise Road Campus

Scripture: [Acts 10:44-48](#)

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[Watch the service.](#)



Growing up, we were the house in the neighborhood where everyone seemed to gather, the central hub where our friends would meet, and we would decide what we wanted to do for the day. One of the things that I remember most is that in the summer when it was lunchtime, my mother fed everyone who was around. It didn't matter if it

was one of mine or my sibling's best friends or someone we barely knew, they had a place at the lunch table. My mom always had enough of whatever we were eating for lunch for anyone who wanted to eat.

My parents divorced when I was 16 and later my Dad would remarry. I feel blessed to have such a wonderful stepmother and I noticed something familiar when we would gather at their house for meals, especially on special occasions. There always seemed to be people at the table who were not a part of our family, not even a part of our extended family. One Thanksgiving, she had invited three people she had met recently to dine with us, three people from Bosnia who had fled that land during the civil war and genocide that took place in the former Yugoslavia in the mid-90s. There was always a place and there was always enough.

I can't help but think how these experiences have formed and shaped the way that I view the church, the way these experiences have provided the lens through which I view mission and ministry, and how each of them has witnessed to me what God is like.

Today we are finishing up a worship series called Belong, Become, Believe. We have been looking at where we start with faith. Traditionally, faith began with belief. Someone confessed faith in Jesus, then they were told how they were to behave and in many respects believe, and then finally they could belong. If this ever really worked, it wasn't a way that was modeled by Jesus. Jesus modeled the need for and the power of belonging. We belong first and in belonging, we become who God intends for us to be, and then we begin to live into what we believe. Belong, Become, Believe.

I want to be clear that belief is important. It matters what we believe, and it matters that we are always open to learning and growing as our beliefs should never be static. We should never close ourselves off to the leading and the teaching of God. God is always being revealed in new and fresh ways. God is always working in our lives and the world around us.

A week after Easter, I was in a store and this store was trying to offload all of their Easter stuff- candy, stuffed bunnies, all of that stuff. Several signs said "Easter 75% off"

I can't help but wonder as we sit here today if we take that same approach to the resurrection. That it feels like the resurrection has been discounted, marked down.

What difference does the resurrection make for the world?

After all, the God who raised Jesus from the dead is a big God. God will do as God does.

Today, we encounter scripture in the book of Acts that is a reminder of just how disruptive the resurrection of Jesus is and how it opens up so many possibilities

Acts 10 begins by breaking down barriers between Jews and Gentiles. The first half of Acts is dealing with the question of "What difference does Easter make for the world?" and one of the differences it makes is that through the Holy Spirit, the barriers to faith between Jews and Gentiles have been broken down. In essence, we learn that the boundaries and borders fabric of expectation we might place upon God.

Peter is preaching when he is interrupted by the Holy Spirit. *"While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell on everyone who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. They heard them speaking in other languages and praising God. Peter asked, "These people have received the Holy Spirit just as we have. Surely no one can stop them from being baptized with water, can they?" He directed that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited Peter to stay for several days."* (Acts 10:44-48 CEB)

The believers, those in the faith, were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on those who were considered unworthy of faith, those considered unworthy of belonging. This is the first time in all of Luke's

writing that the Holy Spirit is poured out on someone *before* baptism. It's a shift.

One of the more powerful films I've seen in the last few years was the movie *Hidden Figures*. It's based on a true story about African American women who worked at NASA and helped the United States space program continue to advance during the time of the space race with the Russians. Katherine Johnson was a brilliant mathematician and her colleagues Dorothy Vaughan and Mary Jackson (as well as other African American women) worked largely hidden away in the segregated West Area division of Langley Research Center in Virginia. Yet these women through brilliance and tenacity and even forcing their NASA co-workers to confront systemic racism helped our country in significant ways. The movie focuses on their roles in helping John Glenn become the first American astronaut to make a complete orbit of the earth.

There are so many poignant scenes in *Hidden Figures*. Though one concerned Mary Jackson who wanted to become an engineer. Mary (who was already a mathematician) began to work with engineer Kazimierz Czarnecki in the 4-foot by 4-foot Supersonic Pressure Tunnel—a wind tunnel capable of blasting models of the spacecraft with winds that approached twice the speed of sound. NASA scientists had to be sure that once astronauts were up in space they could safely land on earth and the heat shield would withstand the heat and wind of re-entry. Kazimierz suggests that Mary should become an engineer and she scoffs at him. It's impossible as an African American woman. He presses on, saying "And I'm a Polish Jew whose parents died in a Nazi prison camp. Now I'm standing beneath a spaceship that's going to carry an astronaut to the stars. Let me ask you—if you were a white male, would you wish to be an engineer?" Mary Jackson looks at him and says without missing a beat, "I wouldn't have to. I'd already be one."

Peter embraces those who had not been fully embraced. Last week, one of the verbs we followed was to join; to be with others and here again, we see the power of proximity. When we are close, we can be the vessels through which God breaks down barriers. We see that God's Word and God's Spirit have the power to renegotiate our preconceived notions. God's Word and God's Spirit have the power to transform you and others when we are in proximity to one another.

We live in a world full of boundaries, full of distinctions. The swimming pool has a floating rope that separates the shallow and the deep ends of the pool. Lines on the gym floor or the playing floor that separate the playing area from out of bounds. Railroad tracks divide one side of town from the other.

Rivers, mountains, and invisible boundaries divide the land into nations. In our daily lives, we have become used to boundaries and distinction.

Yet, the Gospel of Jesus Christ shows no partiality. In this verse, *"These people have received the Holy Spirit just as we have. Surely no one can stop them from being baptized with water, can they?"* (Acts 10:47 CEB)

We experience the great interruption of Jesus and the wideness of God's grace. We see that the Holy Spirit is not bound by any limitations.

Is it possible for us to imagine a boundary that Jesus, the great interrupter, cannot break through?

Can you imagine a Christian community where everyone belongs, one that embraces the full participation and leadership of women and men, young and old, wealthy and poor, gay and straight, black and white, and the list goes on and on?

Can we imagine any boundaries that the Holy Spirit cannot break through? When was the last time Jesus interrupted your life?

As we close this series, I want to say that one of the best things about church is each of us becoming who God has created us to be and through life together, seeing what we believe as followers of Jesus Christ become reality through the way we live. Growing in our beliefs together.

It all starts with belonging. The truth is that none of us have it all figured out.

You belong. To God. And you have a place here.

As we will hear sung in just a moment, God welcomes you with open arms.

Belong, Become, Believe.