

Blown Away on the Way
Acts 10:9-16, 19-29a, 34-36, 42-48
BAPC – 9 May 2021

No question about it – Simon Peter had been **pushed** ... **way** outside of his comfort zone... having been asked... no, **told...** by the Holy Spirit to go to the home of a Roman **Centurion**. Jews were **forbidden** to visit or associate with those who were not Jews – it was against their laws, their customs, their training, their innate sense of rightness. Talk about an **ick** factor! But, these were not simply **not** Jews, they were **Romans** – Roman **soldiers** – like the guys who'd crucified his Lord. And **Cornelius** had some **rank**, too. And he was asking **questions** about their **faith**! You'd better **believe** Peter was uncomfortable... Peter **and** the believers who'd gone with him... much as **we'd** likely be if commanded to walk into a room full of Taliban soldiers... or maybe some Hell's Angels.

Well, comfortable or **not**, the Spirit had **said Go**. And so, there they **were...** in the centurion's home... with Peter relating what he knew about his Lord... what Christ's life and death had meant to them all. To a roomful of, possibly, **very** threatening people, Peter proclaimed the gospel. And **then** the strangest, most **dis-locating** thing occurred – Peter and his fellow disciples witnessed those people, those **Gentiles**, those **enemies**, receiving the **gospel...** taking it to heart, being **opened** by the Spirit to **faith** in Jesus Christ! **And** they saw the gift of the Holy **Spirit** being poured out upon them... saw God's **own** Spirit enlivening those Gentiles... heard those **Gentiles** speaking in tongues, extolling **God...** just as **they** had... exactly the **same** as they had. The Gentiles... were so *different*, so *other...* and yet, they were so much the **same**! It **amazed** the Jewish believers! It was so **unexpected...** so hard for them to wrap their minds around. And, it was so **like** the Holy **Spirit** to have done an **unlikely** thing, like that! It was so like **their Savior, himself...** as they **thought** about it. And, apparently, it was **likely** to be the way that things **often would** be for them – **surprising!** **astounding!** mind-blowing!

So, the Holy Spirit blew them **all** away... and then gathered them all back **together** – the Gentiles **with** the Jews – and together they were **set** upon the **way** of Jesus Christ. It was a way on **which** they'd be **blown away** again and again... as the Holy Spirit **worked out** God's plan for the salvation of **all** the nations... worked it out **through** them, and through others **like** them... **even** others like **us!** **Yes, like us!** We **too** are *heirs of God, fellow heirs with*

Christ. We too are a **Spirit**-driven folk! In **our** lives, **also**, God's Spirit is working... is directing us, stirring us, un-settling and re-settling us... is walking us down a course of **its** choosing... for **its own** great purposes... and not merely for **our** own.

Do you **know Whom** it is that we worship? It is not **ourselves**. It is not anyone whose picture gets hung along the hallway coming over from the church office... not **anyone** who sits or stands up here. Nor is it our heritage, our customs or our traditions. It is **God**, the **living** God... who is **astounding...** to be honest... **way** more often than many of us would **prefer**. We do not **control** God. We may **cooperate** with God; we may assist God in her labors; we may, sometimes, stand directly in God's way. But we do **not** control God. **Ever**.

In one of my favorite scenes from the Narnia Tales, one of the children **visiting** the land of Narnia asks an inhabitant about the Great Lion Aslan (who, as **we** know, represents the **Lord**). She asks, *Is he safe?*

*Is he **safe?***, the Narnian spits out – *Heavens, no, he's not **safe!*** (And it's clear that he has some **personal** knowledge about that.) *He isn't **safe.** But he **is** good.*

One day, Peter and his fellow believers were **directed** by the Spirit to the home of a Gentile. They were **used** by the Spirit as ambassadors of the gospel. They were **shown** by the Spirit that God's **intentions** for who'd be part of Christ's church were way wider than they'd realized or imagined. They were given a **clue** that God's **love** for people would over-leap any wall that was raised before it...that, by the power of that Spirit, **they also** would be led into a life with Christ that was **not** fully **predictable...** but that was **absolutely purposeful...** in that they'd be **partners** with the Spirit in bringing about God's gracious, saving purposes. They **would** be partners. And they **were**. And so, my friends, are you, here at Bon Air Presbyterian!

As a Presbyterian congregation, Bon Air is part of the **Reformed** branch of the Church universal. We **trace** our lineage back to the days of the Reformation, when the Spirit called believers in **many** places to be open to **new** things God was doing in the Church and in the world... to join God in renewing, strengthening and extending the Church in a new age, in new ways, and to new places on earth. The Reformed **part** of Christ's Church is not the entire tree... but it is an impressive branch. And the thing about

being members of a **Reformed** church is that, by definition and by **nature**, you and I are kind of **committed** to being **open** to the Holy Spirit's direction... to **try** to be open to it, anyhow... to be **responsive** when the Spirit moves to reform **us**... to be **ready** to be astounded by what God's doing... to be **faithful** when the Spirit tells us to go "where no Presbyterian's gone before" – whether that's into the lives and homes of people who are different from us... or into forms of ministry that seem edgy to us... or into personal **callings** we've never imagined for ourselves – *Me, run for office? Me, go to seminary? Me, advocate for justice with Unitarians and Jews?* Or maybe it is all of you **together** who'll be called to take Bon Air **Church** in some new direction...to **do** church **differently**... to put some of your considerable resources to a different use... to **become** something in this community that you haven't been **before**... but which God wants and needs you **now** to become. Who knows?

We are **Reformed** Christians – **already** reformed – but also always trying to be **open** to being **re-formed** by the Holy Spirit... Who, we should acknowledge, is **not** safe, who does sometimes unsettle us, but who is most assuredly good... and trustworthy. If the Spirit commands us to **go**, we can **count** on God to go with us. If the journey demands a lot of us, we can count on God to sustain us on the way, to provide bread for the journey... even the Bread of Life... along with the cup of salvation!

Where will the Spirit lead you? **What** will the Spirit call you to do? In what **ways** will the Spirit use you to accomplish what it plans? Whatever you think... whatever you picture as the possibilities... I'll bet that **when** God makes it **clear** to you, you'll **still** be astounded... because God definitely **is amazing**! So, there's a very **real** chance that, like Simon Peter, some days you also are going to be blown **away** on the way.

Go with the flow, friends. Go with God's flow!