

# Sixth Sunday of Easter

## SOMEONE'S KNOCKING AT THE DOOR

Acts 10:44-48

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## Analysis by Chris Repp

44While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word.45The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles,46for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said,47“Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?”48So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.

*Author's Note: This pericope cannot be understood apart from the context of the whole of Acts 10. I will draw on earlier verses in my analysis.*

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## DIAGNOSIS: Withholding

### **Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** : *Closing the Door*

The rules say, and experience confirms, that we should separate ourselves from “those people” who are not like us – people who do not share our values and way of life, who eat strange food, wear funny clothes, are too loud (or too quiet), who transgress the norms of acceptable behavior. A recent map created with 2010 census data show how well we follow the rules when it comes to race in the United States, and reveals that the cities that are

the most racially diverse also tend to be the most segregated. But we also separate ourselves from those of different religions or denominations, different social and economic classes, and political persuasions.

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Trust in the Rules***

We follow the rules because we trust them, and we trust them because they work for us. We put stock in our heritage and our traditions. We are loyal to our kind, and our loyalty is often repaid. Like helps like in hiring, in policing, in business ventures, and in community initiatives.

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *The Law Kills***

The rules must be enforced when our status quo and our interests are threatened. Those who break the rules and norms are expendable – their suffering is unfortunate, but it is a result of their own doing. And those who disagree are dangerous – even if they are anointed by God (v. 38). If they die at our hands, well it is a price we're willing to pay.

## **PROGNOSIS: Outpouring**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *The Spirit Makes Alive***

Of course you see where I'm going with this. Jesus was one of those dangerous people, in the tradition of the prophets anointed by God, who challenged our trust in the rules at the expense of others. Dedicated to God's mission of peace and healing from all oppression (vv. 36, 38), he gave himself over to our implementation of the rules and became our victim, just like so many before him. But this time there was a crucial difference. For he was no ordinary prophet, but the Lord of all (v. 36). God did not allow death to be the last word for him, but raised him from death to life, and ordained him to be both the judge of the living and the dead and the source of

forgiveness of sin (v. 43).

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Trusting the Spirit***

You see, unlike our partial rules that work so well for us (so we think), God shows no partiality (v. 34). God's promise of love and reconciliation is for all people, and when that promise is made known the Holy Spirit is poured out and gets to work creating faith – trust in the promise even as it is made.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Opening the Door***

Who indeed can withhold this astounding grace that God intends for all people? Who would want to? Doors are opened. Walls come down. The Body of Christ grows and reaches out to the world that God loves. And we abide and bear the fruits of the spirit (v. 48, NRSV “stay,” borrowing just a bit from last week's Gospel text, John 8:1-8).