

Leave Your Comfort Zone

ACTS 11:1-18

1



GOAL

Youth identify characteristics that define their comfort zone and explore who may exist on the other side of their borders.

- A Art
- AM Active/Movement
- AT Abstract Thinking
- C Conversation
- CT Concrete Thinking
- D Drama
- G Game
- M Music
- QC Quiet/Contemplative
- S Service
- T Technology
- X Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

Creating God, may I bravely cross the borders of my comfort zone to walk alongside these youth, your beloved creations. May we grow in courage together. Amen.

THIS SESSION

Within borders, people find their comfort zones; these are places where people can feel safe, well, and comfortable. During this session, young people examine their comfort zones, the ways that they define themselves, and the borders they have in place. By engaging people from different religious traditions and backgrounds, they explore ways to encounter the unfamiliar and build relationships across borders.

THE BIBLE STORY

Acts 11:1-18 recounts Peter's report to the apostles in Jerusalem following his trip to Joppa. He had preached to the Gentiles, and they had become believers. Other apostles were concerned that Peter was preaching to people outside the borders that defined the people of God. Peter received a vision in which he was asked to venture outside the safe borders of his culture. He witnessed the gift of the Holy Spirit being given to new believers in Joppa without regard to the distinctions that humans put in place. In recounting his vision and his experience in Joppa, Peter opened the door for new understanding and unity in the early church.

CONNECTIONS WITH YOUTH

Youth connect with the idea that rules exist within social groups. They may have experienced the discomfort of behaving in ways that don't align with group expectations. In this time in their development, youth are learning to define themselves as individuals and are acutely aware of social norms. They are learning who they are, and they may be reluctant to share aspects of themselves with the group for fear of rejection. Be mindful of this and give them opportunity to share as little or as much as they are comfortable.

SESSION PREPARATION

Depending on the options you choose:

- "Exploring Other Faith Traditions" (p. 8): Speak to an imam or rabbi to arrange a time to visit or prepare youth to visit a worship or prayer service in the community.
- "Setting the Lord's Table" (p. 9): Purchase loaves of bread common to diverse cultures (pita, tortilla, challah, baguette, etc.). Be mindful of food allergies.
- "Committing to the Practice" (p. 9): Use a knotted rope that is long enough for all participants to hold with both hands.

GETTING STARTED

-
- Paper
 - Colored pencils or markers

MY COMFY SPOT A C CT

Give each participant a piece of paper to design their perfect hangout. Encourage them to list features, draw items in the room, or design a map of the space. Remind them that this space does not need to exist in real life and can be as imaginative as they wish. Have them think about and include in their design things that they love or activities that they engage in.

Invite volunteers to share their design. Discuss why they included particular objects and what the room says about their likes and interests.

Explain that, during this unit, we will explore the ways we define ourselves and ways that we can faithfully learn about and from those who are different from us.



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

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- Copies of Resource Page 1
 - Glory to God* hymnal or hymnal with the tune THE SERVANT SONG or internet-connected device

PILGRIMS ON A JOURNEY M T AM

Distribute copies of Resource Page 1 and invite youth to sing the first verse of “We Are Pilgrims on a Journey” using the familiar tune THE SERVANT SONG (*Glory to God*, #727, or another hymnal with that tune); for instrumental accompaniment, play the YouTube video “The Servant Song” (bit.ly/FMServantSongInstrumental, 2:26, stopping at 0:42). Then lead the litany, inviting people to follow the motions. Read in unison the questions asking who we are.

Save the Resource Page to use throughout the practice.



Teaching Tip: To include people with limited mobility, give each person two different colored sheets of paper. Designate colors to correspond with the choices given and have them raise their colored sheets to show their preferences.

THIS OR THAT? AM CT G

Tell the youth that you are going to give them two choices. They will choose the option that they like the most and move to the side of the room that you designate for each choice. Invite youth to comment on their choices before offering another pair.

Pairs of choices:

- Skittles or M&Ms?
- Dogs or cats?
- Math or English?
- Beach or pool?
- Camping or sightseeing?
- Baseball or hockey?

-
- 11" x 17" paper
 - Pens

MY COMFORT ZONES AT C QC

Give each participant a piece of paper and a pen. Invite them to think about the groups of which they are part. These may be actual groups or categories of people that define them. Offer some broad examples (their family, their church, their state) and some more specific ones (dog lover, middle child, afraid of spiders). Have them list as many groups as they can, writing them all over their paper.

Next, have them draw a circle around each of the groups. Explain that we belong to many different groups. When we are in these groups, we share a common understanding, and we feel like we belong. We are safe within the borders. These are our comfort zones.

Ask participants to think about who might exist outside the borders they marked on their paper. For instance, if they wrote dog lover, then cat lover would be outside the border. If they wrote Texan, then New Yorker would be outside the border. Some of these borders may be easy to cross, but others might require us to learn and behave in new ways.



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Choose one or both options.

MAPPING BORDERS

A AT C

Have a volunteer cut out the map pieces from Resource Page 2. Work together to reassemble the map and glue it onto a sheet of paper. Read aloud Acts 11:1–18, pausing to locate the places on the map named in the text. Notice the borders that might exist between these cities. Some could be physical borders such as walls. Others could be religious or political borders.

Explain that a *Gentile* was a person who was not a Jew. Some Gentiles came to believe in God and Jesus and follow Jewish traditions, but they were not from Jewish families and did not know or follow all Jewish laws. Some followed other religions. Discuss how Peter might have felt as he traveled through these places and crossed borders. How might the Gentiles have felt with Peter traveling among them?

- Resource Page 2
- Paper
- Glue
- Scissors

READER'S THEATER

AM D

Give each participant a copy of Resource Page 3. Let participants choose among themselves who will read each part. Then read the story together.

Invite youth to discuss how they think each of the characters felt. Wonder with them about how the apostles felt when they heard Peter's story, how Peter felt when told to try new foods, and how the people felt when Peter preached. Discuss the effects of Peter crossing borders.

- Copies of Resource Page 3



FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

Choose one or both options.

FOOD RULES

CT C T

Ask participants how they feel when they eat unfamiliar foods. Explain that, when Peter protested, saying that nothing unclean had ever entered his mouth, he told them that he followed traditional Jewish laws about food. Many Jewish food laws, which prescribe Jewish kosher foods, can be found in the book of Leviticus. In his travels, Peter was asked not to simply eat unfamiliar food but to eat food that was against the food laws he observed as part of his faith.

Use an internet-connected device to read “Daily Life: Food Laws” (bit.ly/FMJewishFoods) about food practices in Judaism.

Explain that many cultures still follow strict laws about food, including Jews and Muslims. Show the video “Kosher Food and Halal Food: What’s the Difference?” (bit.ly/FMKosherHalal, 1:16). You may reference notes that accompany the video at bit.ly/FMKeepKosher.

- Internet-connected device

Invite youth to talk about experiences they may have had eating kosher or halal foods. Identify rules around eating certain foods in their own culture. Discuss what happens if or when people cross borders in eating certain foods.

Internet-connected device

SING A NEW SONG

AT M T

Explain to youth that one way that a church might try to cross borders of their comfort zones is by learning to sing hymns from other cultures and languages. Show the YouTube video “May the God of Hope Go with Us Every Day (¡Dios de la esperanza, danos gozo y paz!)” (bit.ly/FMGodofHope, 2:04). Invite youth to sing along. Discuss these questions:

- ➔ What is it like to sing words that are not familiar to you?
- ➔ How might singing this song help someone feel more comfortable?
- ➔ How does singing the song in two languages encourage crossing borders?



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

Internet-connected device

EXPLORING OTHER FAITH TRADITIONS

AM C M X

If your group is able to visit a local mosque or synagogue, provide youth time, date, and transportation plans. Explain any requirements for dress or behavior that were discussed with the imam or the rabbi. Visiting a synagogue or mosque may not be possible for your group. Viewing the videos below can give an idea of what might have been experienced.



Teaching Tip: Explain any expectations or actions that will be unfamiliar to the youth. It may be helpful to watch a video explaining services from the tradition that you plan to visit. Some helpful videos to show:

Synagogue:

- “What to Expect at a Synagogue—InterfaithFamily.com” (bit.ly/FMSynagogue, 7:35)
- “Visiting a Synagogue for the First Time” (bit.ly/FMFirstVisit, 10:01)

Mosque:

- “This Is What Happens inside a Mosque . . . How to Visit a Mosque” (bit.ly/FMMosque, 6:29)
- “How to Attend a Muslim Friday Prayer Service (Jum’ah)” (bit.ly/FMFridayPrayer, 3:24)

After visiting, discuss what you saw and heard. Ask questions such as:

- ➔ How was the service like the worship services you are used to? What was different?
- ➔ How did it feel to take part in a service with different traditions?
- ➔ What did you learn about people from a different faith tradition?
- ➔ How does participating in one another’s worship or prayer service help us cross borders?

SETTING THE LORD'S TABLE

AM CT X

Invite participants to describe the food that is used to celebrate the Lord's Supper in your congregation. For many churches in the United States, bread and juice or wine will be familiar. Explain that we use bread and wine because they are basic staples of our diet, as they were at the time of Jesus.

Since the Lord's Supper is celebrated by Christians around the world, identify different types of bread that might be used in other cultures. If you provided breads, encourage youth to taste the varieties (optional). Discuss how using different breads helps us cross borders and welcome the traditional breads of our siblings around the world.

- Varieties of bread (optional)



If you provide a variety of breads (optional), be mindful of participants who have food allergies (wheat, nuts, eggs, dairy, etc.) and have options available. Keep foods separate to avoid cross contamination.

EXPANDING YOUR COMFORT ZONE

CT AT C

If you chose "My Comfort Zones" from page 6, have youth refer to their papers and the groups they circled as their comfort zones. If you did not choose this activity, distribute paper and pens and have youth list down the left side of their paper the places and groups where they feel they belong.

Have them review their comfort zones and begin to think of what it might be like to move outside these zones. Identify places or groups that are outside their comfort zones. List these on the back side or down the right side of their paper. Have them select one *un*-comfortable zone and imagine themselves stepping into that place.

Discuss feelings, expectations, or fears that arise as they imagine themselves in an *un*-comfortable zone. What could support them in feeling more comfortable? Why might they want to try out new places or groups?

- Papers created in "My Comfort Zones" (optional)
- Paper and pens



FOLLOWING JESUS

Choose one or both options.

COMMITTING TO THE PRACTICE

AM X

Lay the rope in a circle. Invite youth to form a circle on the inside of the rope circle. Explain that the rope forms a border, a comfort zone for this group at this time. Remind the youth that it is OK to have a comfort zone that defines who we are and how we are unique as a group. Invite each youth to name one characteristic of this group that is comfortable.

Explain that, even in our comfort zones, we are challenged to step out and work with others who are different from us. Invite the youth to make a commitment to look for a chance to learn about a new tradition or activity this week. Have them take a step over the rope to symbolize their commitment to cross borders.

- Long rope with ends tied to make a loop (Keep the rope for use in other sessions.)

CLOSE IN PRAYER

QC

Gather or remain in a circle. Line out the following prayer and have youth repeat after you.

God of love, /

You call us into community / with you and with all of your creation. /

Walk with us / as we go from this place. /

Give us courage / to leave our comfort zone. /

May we, in our walking, / make this world more like the kin-dom
of heaven. /

Amen. /

Pilgrims on a Journey Song and Litany

We are pilgrims on a journey
to another time and place,
singing songs and telling stories
to recall God's love and grace.¹

When we cross a border,
When we travel from here to there,
Who are we?

- Are we tourists?** (pretend to take a picture)
- Are we pilgrims?** (pretend to hold a staff)
- Are we refugees?** (walk as if carrying a backpack)
- Are we missionaries?** (pretend to open a Bible)
- Are we diplomats?** (make the peace sign "V" with index and middle fingers)
- Are we soldiers?** (pretend to put on a helmet)
- Are we students?** (pretend to write in a notebook)
- Are we teachers?** (pretend to write on a chalkboard)

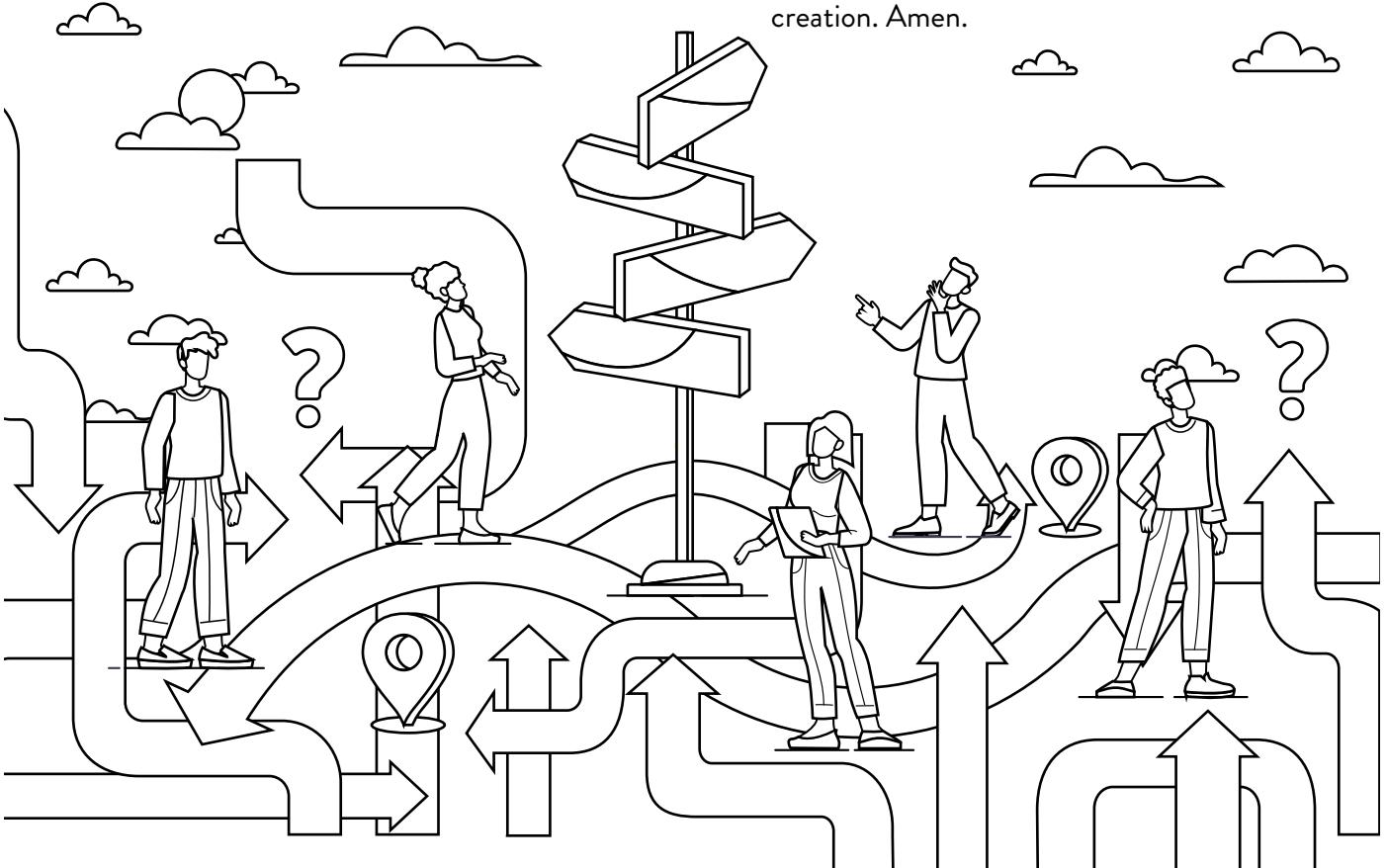
When someone crosses a border and comes to where
we are,
When they travel from there to here,
Who are we?

- Are we innkeepers?** (pretend to hold a lantern out)
- Are we family?** (give an air hug)
- Are we guardians?** (cross arms and stand with feet spread apart)
- Are we strangers?** (place right hand on heart and stretch out left hand, palm out as in "stop")
- Are we enemies?** (put arms up in boxing stance)
- Are we interpreters?** (turn head from side to side pretending to talk to others)
- Are we tour guides?** (point to left and right as if pointing out sites)
- Are we first responders?** (pretend to hold up another person)

Let us step out and discover who we are and who they are.

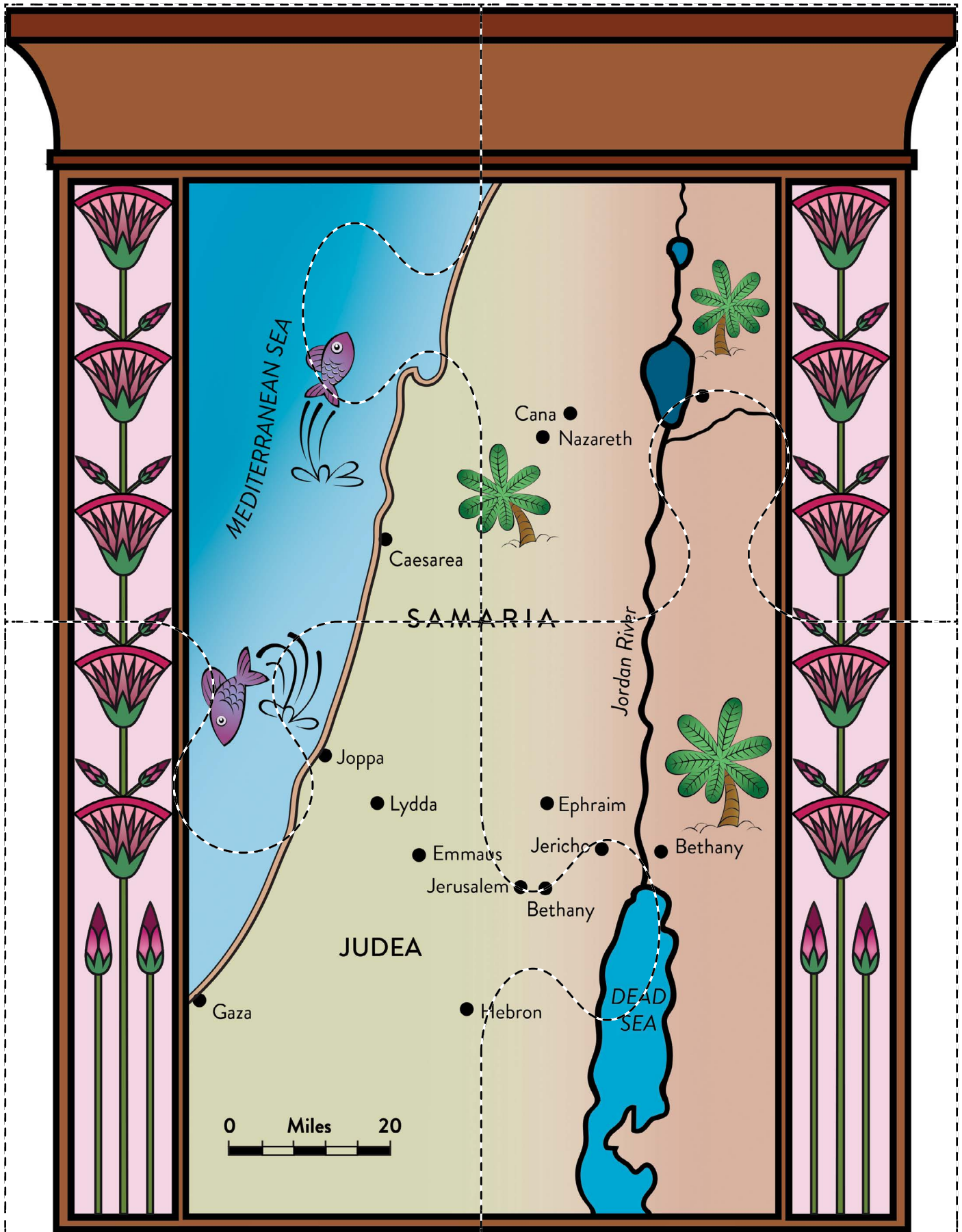
Pray this prayer or one of your choosing:

God, you made each of us perfectly yours. You gave us loving hearts and invited us to live in loving community. Help us to try new things and make new friends. Help us bravely leave our comfort zones and discover the beauty of your creation. Amen.



1. Text excerpted from "We Are Pilgrims on a Journey," by Mary Nelson Keithahn. © 2017 Wayne Leupold Editions, Inc. Used by permission.

Mapping the Borders



Reader's Theater

List of Characters:

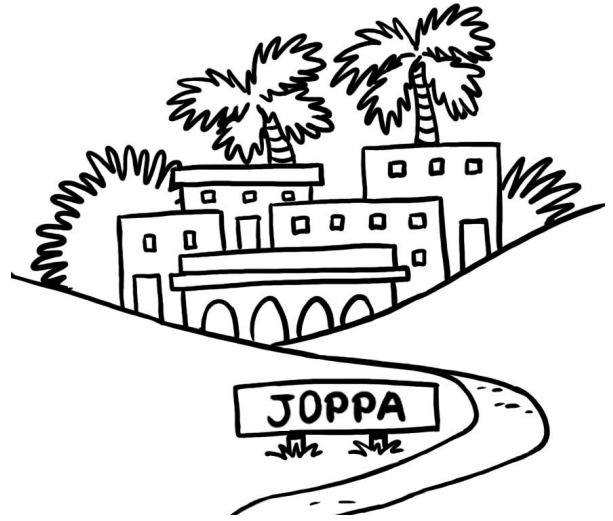
Apostles in Jerusalem

Peter

The Lord, Jesus

The Angel

The Man



Apostles in Jerusalem: The Gentiles have accepted the word of God! Peter, why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?

Peter: I was in the city of Joppa praying. In a trance, I saw a vision. There was something like a large sheet coming down from heaven, being lowered by its four corners; and it came close to me. As I looked at it closely, I saw four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air. I also heard a voice saying to me . . .

The Lord: “Get up, Peter; kill and eat.”

Peter: I answered: “By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth.”

The Lord: “What God has made clean, you must not call profane.”

Peter: This happened three times; then everything was pulled up again to heaven. At that very moment, three men, sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were. The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house.

The Man: I had seen the angel standing in my house. The angel spoke.

The Angel: “Send to Joppa and bring Simon, who is called Peter; he will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved.”

Peter: And as I began to speak to the people in the house, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, and how Jesus had once spoken.

Jesus: “John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

Peter: If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?

Apostles in Jerusalem: Hmmm. Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life! Praise be to God!

