

WELCOME 30th June 2024 – 6th Sunday after Pentecost '24 B

Acts 9:1-19 & 22:12-16

Welcome! It's great to be together again today! **Bible Study Qs/GPs** are there to equip you so God can lead you deeper into His word/work in your life, & farther out into his world to you can share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our **Zoom** Bible Study Catch-ups on Friday @ 1p.m.

As we move into this week... **Courage** is not the absence of fear. It's acting in spite of it. It's moving against the resistance caused by fear into the unknown. 6 weeks ago, we started this series w/ those words. We openly acknowledged that at some point every one of us is afraid. Every one of us feels the icy grip of fear...of being wrong or embarrassed...of looking foolish or that others will think less of us...of some huge risk in relationships or reputation...

BUT in every one of those fearful moments, we have the opportunity to act. That's called LIVING COURAGEOUSLY...acting in spite of fear...doing what is right even if the risk is high & the cost great...trusting God when others won't...doing what God calls us to do even if we can't imagine why it's us that is called to do it.

Today...Ananias, the only one suitable in God's estimation for the role he is called to carry out. He can't imagine why...but when he acts obediently...faithfully...courageously in response to God's call...obedient to God's word, what follows is a great harvest for God's kingdom that includes you & me.

Ananias went & found Saul. He laid his hands on him & said,
'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road,
has sent me so that you might regain your sight & be filled with the Holy Spirit...
For you are to be his witness, telling everyone what you have seen & heard.'

One courageous act obedient to God's word or in response to God's call can lead to a great harvest for the Kingdom.

We'll experience & share that today...Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Lord God, sometimes it is easy to feel like we are surrounded by enemies... outnumbered & overwhelmed...& whether we believe it or not...whether it's the center of our existence or an idea that seems just too crazy to be true...you love us & will not let us be lost to this world & its raging against you. Draw our lives deeper into that assurance every day. Let today be that day when your love is made real for us & powerful in us simply through the work of Jesus Christ who gave himself so we could know you & live in your presence forever...By your Spirit offer your salvation through our words & deeds...in Jesus' Name...Amen.

Let's sing and then hear God's Word

FAITH CHAT:

1. What's the biggest "faith risk" you've ever taken? What happened?
2. If Ananias doesn't obey what God commands, what happens?
Put yourself in Ananias shoes...

SIDE NOTE: Edward Kimball Sunday School Teacher 1840's in the US to a bunch of hyperactive young boys. He set his focus on one particularly troublesome teenager who had little interest in God or religion. So he kept after him, & during a visit with this young man at his job in a shoe shop, he led the boy into a relationship with Christ. That boy...Dwight L Moody ...pastor teacher evangelist major Christian leader who in the name of Jesus impacted the life of Wilbur Chapman, an evangelist who reached thousands in the 1890's Chapman's evangelism reached professional baseball player Billy Sunday, who later became a pastor/evangelist in the early 1900's impacting the life of Mordecai Ham who became a traveling evangelist & is credited as being responsible for introducing a young man named Billy Graham to Jesus...Graham we know preached to more people than any other person who ever lived, including the Apostle Paul. This chain of events goes back to a humble Sunday School teacher (Edward Kimball) who persisted in the hard work of ministering to difficult youth who didn't want anything to do with God. His name is a footnote in history, but his impact and legacy are huge.

6 Pentecost '24 B – LIVING COURAGEOUSLY: ANANIAS

What do you think it would have been like to be a follower of Jesus in Damascus knowing Saul was on his way to town?

Saul was uttering murderous threats with every breath & was eager to kill the Lord's followers. So he went to the high priest. He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking for their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them—both men & women—back to Jerusalem in chains.

What would have been going through your heart & mind knowing Saul's coming your way? Would you hide? Leave town? Me...I don't know...but I know...Whatever anyone else is doing, Ananias stays. When Saul stumbled into town blind as a bat & likely more confused than he'd ever been in his life Ananias is still doing whatever it was he did. Was it Thomas Edison who said "90% of success is just showing up"? Ananias seems like a guy who just keeps showing up.

When we look at Acts 9, we usually focus on Saul/Paul...but let's leave him for a bit. He's been knocked on his backside by Jesus & left for blind @ someone named Judas' house over on Straight Street. He's not going anywhere...Ananias however...

Now there was a believer in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision, calling, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord!" he replied. Hang on...How'd he know it was Jesus? In my house...I hear my name...I assume it's Leonie or Brenna. Don't laugh...who in this room would do differently? Look, I grew up laughing at the old comedienne Lily Tomlin who was famous for saying, "If I say I talk to God you call it prayer...but if I say God talks to me you call me 'nuts!'" We're rightly skeptical of people who say they hear from God. We get nervous if people start a sentence, "God told me..."

Years ago TV evangelist Pat Robertson shared God told him to pray a hurricane away from his house in Florida. I thought that was selfish because that hurricane did horrific damage in Georgia & South Carolina two states right up the coast from FLA

But for most of us...we've turned that natural skepticism into an excuse...we don't EXPECT Jesus to talk TO us. We read our Bibles or daily devotions & the only voice we're listening for is our own. We worship & expect to hear the preacher or leaders or singers...but we don't expect Jesus to talk to us. We don't expect faith to get intensely personal. "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord!" Many of us live our whole lives expecting nothing like that will ever happen to us. And we're ok w/ that. We don't expect Jesus to talk to us because we know that if he DID & we said, "Yes Lord" our lives would instantly become more complicated & we don't want that...So eventually we stop listening & of course we can't hear him...our expectation → our reality. Thankfully, Ananias isn't like that...

Ananias was a godly man, deeply devoted to the law, & well regarded by all the Jews of Damascus. Ananias is a Jewish convert to Jesus but still held in esteem by Jews. He grew up, like Saul, steeped in the Law God handed to Moses & was transmitted to God's people over the centuries but HE has seen its fulfillment in Jesus. All his hopes now rest in Jesus crucified risen & ruling over all things. He reads what we call the OT & sees Jesus face' smiling at him on every page. He recites OT hymns & Psalms & hears his voice in harmony w/ that of Jesus. So in one of those moments of deep personal worship & devotion he hears THAT voice to which he has grown as accustomed as his own: "Ananias!" & he only knows one answer "Yes, Lord!" The boy Samuel had to be taught to say, "Speak Lord for your servant is listening." Isaiah was blown over in a vision but came out saying "Here I am Lord. Send me." Ananias offers a simple direct...Yes Lord...as if he knows there's a call he's about to answer.

But as we suspect would happen to us if we listened intently for Jesus to speak to us...Ananias' life is about to get complicated: The Lord said, "Go over to Straight Street, to the house of Judas. When you get there, ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul. He is praying to me right now. I have shown him a vision of a man named Ananias coming in & laying hands on him so he can see again." I love what happens next. It's exactly what happens many many times in the Bible. God's chosen servant receives their call from God & they immediately proceed to educate God on all the reasons why this call is a bad idea. We saw it in Moses. 5 excuses culminating in "Please send someone else!" Pick someone called by God & you see it ≈ every X

"But Lord," exclaimed Ananias, "I've heard many people talk about the terrible things this man has done to the believers in Jerusalem! He is authorized by the leading priests to arrest everyone who calls upon your name." "Scuse me Jesus...Do you not know who Saul is? Did you not get the memo from all those folks he's had thrown in prison, tortured...killed? This is the Saul famous for turning your followers into martyrs. In this moment, Ananias reflects something I know I feel at times, maybe you too. Ananias sees Saul as irredeemable...beyond the pale...Ananias has given up on Saul. He views this terror of the church from the limited perspective of his past rejection & attack on Jesus & those who believe in Jesus. No...Jesus...that person said 'no' b/4 & really got angry when I shared about you...not going there again. No Lord my kids had a bad experience & want nothing to do with your church. No Jesus I'm the only one in my family...circle of friends...I can't afford those relationships... It's hard to admit...but Ananias & I (maybe you?) fall into the same trap at this point... Not only do we not expect Jesus to talk TO us, but we don't expect Jesus to work THROUGH US. That only happens to the big shots of the faith.

But the Lord said, “Go, for Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles & to kings, as well as to the people of Israel. And I will show him how much he must suffer for my name’s sake.” Ananias has given up on Saul. Christ has not. Ananias knows Saul’s past & his present & it scares him. Christ knows Saul’s future & it brings him great joy. Ananias sees through limited earth-bound eyes. Christ sees through all eternity. Christ sees not just Saul...but all those the Spirit will claim as the Father’s own children through Saul. Christ sees the churches Saul will plant, the generations of churches they will plant, the generations of disciples they will raise up & release into the world in obedience to Christ’s commission to his **WHOLE** church **“All authority in heaven & on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go & make disciples of all the nations, baptize them in the name of the Father & the Son & the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey everything that I have commanded you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”** – Mt 28:18-20 **You** did not choose me, but I chose you. I appointed you to go & bear fruit, fruit that will last, so the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. – Jn 15:16

I don’t know how many people in my life I have put in my “too hard” basket & written off any opportunity of inviting them to get to know the Jesus I lean into every day of my life. I don’t know how many times to my shame I have walked away from a chance to say, “Hang on...that’s not what the Bible says...that’s not what Jesus does.” I don’t know how many times I or someone like me has looked at that commission & those promises & failed to act on them...See...we can talk all day about what God has promised to do through the lives of his Spirit-filled people, his church, but we will never live in fulfillment of those promises until we act on them. We will never see those promises reach their fullness until we live-act-speak in obedience to what those promises require.

But the Lord said, “Go, for Saul is **MY** chosen instrument to take **MY** message to the Gentiles & to kings, as well as to the people of Israel. And I will show him how much he must suffer for **MY** name’s sake.” The question for Ananias & for each one of us...**Who** is in charge? It is unmistakable as Ananias again hears Christ say “Go!” **It** is our job to obey Christ’s call & His to orient Saul’s heart...or the heart of those to whom Jesus sends us. It is our job to obey & His to orient the hearts of those around us by the Spirit at work in & through us. The tragedy I have seen over & over again is not only do we not expect Jesus to talk **TO** us, & not expect Jesus to work **THROUGH** us but many Christ-followers I know **don’t** expect lives, circumstances, or situations to change as we obey Christ’s call. As surely as we don’t expect to hear the voice of Jesus in Scripture prayer or worship, or expect his power to be effective through our lives, we simultaneously don’t expect our prayers or witness will make a lick of difference... they’ll never listen...I tried & they shut me down...Yep me too. It is our job to obey & His to orient the hearts of those to

whom he sends us.

The 2nd Faith Chat Question this morning: **If** Ananias doesn’t obey what happens? Could God have handled it w/out Ananias? Certainly. But God uses us to be the catalyst of His work in the world. When we pick up our cross to follow Jesus, die to ourselves, & step obediently into His calling for us (no matter how big or how small) **THAT** is when we experience God in His fullness. When Mother Teresa opened her first home for the dying poor in India, she entertained no ambition for worldwide fame or thoughts of meeting presidents & accepting awards. Serving Christ would be its own reward: **“You** must not be afraid to say ‘Yes’ to Jesus, because there is no greater love than His love & no greater joy than His joy.” In listening for & responding to the call of Christ, we find ourselves empowered by him in ways we could never have imagined. This isn’t usually in some miracle moment but in our everyday lives among family & friends, in the familiar settings of our neighborhoods, schools & places of work, in our domestic routines & leisure activities.

So Ananias went & found Saul. He laid his hands on him & said, **“Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so that you might regain your sight & be filled with the Holy Spirit... The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will & to see the Righteous One & hear him speak. For you are to be his witness, telling everyone what you have seen & heard.”** Brother Saul...Ananias seems to now know something Saul does not...He stands alongside Saul not as an enemy...not as a target for martyrdom...not afraid, but as a brother...bold & assured in Christ.

In every one of our fearful moments, we have the opportunity to act...to obey. That’s called **LIVING COURAGEOUSLY**...acting in spite of fear...doing what is right even if the risk is high & the cost great...trusting God when others won’t...doing what God calls us to do even if we can’t imagine why it’s us that is called to do it.

One courageous act obedient to God’s word or in response to God’s call can lead to a great harvest for the Kingdom.

TAKE IT HOME –

Who is someone “intimidating” God has placed in your life so your faithful & courageous obedience in Jesus’ Name could become God’s catalyst in them?

Let’s pray w/ that in mind... *Lord Jesus, you came for us. You came for sinful us to make us children of God. Not by our will or work, but by your grace we are yours. In the power of your Spirit make us faithful recipients and courageous transmitters of this legacy of love and life found only in you. We ask this in your precious name. Amen.*