

“We Each Have an Individual Mission Field”

Acts 9:1-22

Christ is risen!! He is risen indeed!! Alleluia!!

On Easter, we heard how the disciples were hesitant to believe the report of the empty tomb as it was presented by the women. Last week, in our Gospel, we heard of how Thomas was not going to believe until he put his fingers into the wounds of Christ. And the disciples were “full-time” church workers.

This week, we hear of another reluctant servant, but I’m not talking about Paul. Paul, although he was reluctant to believe before the Damascus road experience, he was very receptive to the Gospel after he heard Christ. He believed immediately.

Ananias was the one who was hesitant. For him, He had been given what seemed to be an unpleasant job to do. God gave Ananias the task of laying his hands on Saul of Tarsus, and in so doing God would restore Saul’s sight.

Now laying hands on a person is not a tough job. And laying hands on a person and blessing him should certainly not be unpleasant nor a cause for reluctance. Normally, if God would have called to His servant Ananias and made this request for him to lay hands on a person, there would have been no hesitation or uneasiness about it. And by this time, Ananias was pretty much what we would consider a “full-time” church worker. But Saul of Tarsus was

no ordinary man.

Saul was one of the leaders of the opposition. Saul had dedicated the past months of his life to destroying the Christian church. Saul was responsible for the arrest of many Christians in Jerusalem. He was present and giving approval when Stephen was stoned to death. For those early Christians, Saul of Tarsus was one of the most feared men in all of Israel. And now Ananias has the task of going to him, restoring his sight, and welcoming him into the family of believers.

Forgiving fellow believers in Christ with whom we have a close relationship is often quite difficult for us. We hold grudges. We avoid certain people. Imagine what was going through Ananias' mind. Think of that one person in your life who has caused you the most grief. Think of that individual who seems to make your life miserable whenever he or she opens their mouth. Now imagine that you are told that this person wants to reconcile their differences with you. This is a person who has mistreated you and has caused great trouble in your life.

How would you handle the situation? What does God tell Ananias to do? God tells Ananias that the events of the past were paid for with the blood of Christ. This wicked man named Saul is a sinner who needs forgiveness just like everyone else.

We can learn a valuable lesson from Ananias. Those people in our lives who seem to cause us so much grief and suffering are sinners who need to be called to repentance and be forgiven, and they are sinners who God wants to forgive. It is our sinful nature that gives us the attitude that Ananias first had when he said, "Lord, I have heard

from many about this man, how much evil he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem.”

We often think this way. We often think that what God really wants to do is to severely punish those sinful people who cause so much trouble in this world. Bad things should happen to bad people. That is often our desire. Now the Law demands that sin is punished. However, it is not God’s desire to punish people. It is God’s desire for His message of the Gospel, His message of Christ crucified and risen from the dead, to be shared with all people so that He can forgive them. Christ has endured our punishment for us.

And the message reaching those who are reluctant to believe becomes even more difficult when the people of God are reluctant to even offer the message.

We can learn from the example that Ananias set for us. Ananias went to Saul. He went to one of the most despicable, feared men that a Christian could imagine, he placed his hands on him, and he greets him with the words, “Brother Saul...” Ananias receives him as a fellow brother in Christ and baptizes him.

It sounds like a familiar story: Undeserving sinful people being forgiven and called into God’s family. It’s our story. Ananias is only doing what all Christians are called to do: follow the example that Christ set for us, forgive the people who have sinned against us, and be an example for others. How can someone understand the message of forgiveness from God if they have never experienced forgiveness from the people of God.

Like Ananias, each one of us has been entrusted with the message of the Gospel. Each of you has the opportunity to be

another person's Ananias. Every Christian has the opportunity to give support or comfort to a struggling neighbor, or to be that person who invites them to join the family of the church. Last week, I don't know what Pastor Cluver said, but I am sure he told you about what is going on with our mission dollars and how we support those who have dedicated their life to "full-time" mission work. And that is very important. But God has entrusted each of you with your individual mission field.

It is a privilege to be given the opportunity to share the message of the forgiveness of sins with the lost people of this world and bring them into the family of God. We are the ambassadors of Christ in this lost world. Don't think that you are unskilled or unqualified to adequately share the Good News of Christ because you don't have a diploma from a school named Concordia. The effectiveness of the Gospel is not found in the eloquence of the words spoken, but it is solely in the power of the Word of God.

God is the one who calls people into His family. We are only the messengers of this Good News. Throughout this Easter season, we marvel at the work of our risen Lord. We hear of the events surrounding the calling of Saul of Tarsus (of all people) to be an apostle. Christ's church has always had those who are reluctant to hear, and those who are reluctant to speak. And we praise, honor, and give glory to God for doing such great things through such ordinary sinful people like Saul, Ananias, and you and me. Amen.
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