

“Chosen to carry my name,” Acts 9:1-22  
Tom Johnson, April 18, 2010

Saul is on his way to Damascus to purge the synagogues of these Christians. And he carries with him the papers and the authority to arrest any of those belonging to “the Way”—those who follow Jesus.

We don’t know if Saul believes that these Christians are liars or lunatics, but it is clear that he believes they are caught up in a lie. He does not believe that Jesus was Lord. He does not believe that Jesus was the King—Messiah. He does not believe that Jesus has risen from the dead.

Saul is “still breathing threats and murder” against Christians. Saul does not just dislike or lack toleration for Christians, he hunts Christians. And he is thorough. He gets his hunting license from the high priest himself.

Saul’s plan is to find out who these Christians are, break them down, bind their hands behind their back, and take them to Jerusalem as prisoners of a religious war. Saul wants to be an agent of God—to bring them to justice.

Little does Saul know that Jesus is on his own hunt—breathing peace and life. Jesus’ plan is to pursue sinners. He wants to break them down in humility so he can lift them up. He wants to bind them with his love and mercy, so that we can know true freedom in the Gospel. And so he pursues Saul.

Jesus appears to Saul as a blinding light. Jesus knocks him off his high horse and off course to do his dirty deed. And as Saul is lying there on the ground, Jesus tells him that when you mistreat Christians, you mistreat the resurrected Lord of heaven and earth. We are the apple of his eye.

Instead of binding Christians and carrying them to Jerusalem to drive out their faith in Jesus, Saul is bound by his blindness and is carried off to Damascus to drive out his unbelief in Jesus.

And what of those Christians that Saul was on his way to arrest. Why were so many of them willing to suffer for their faith in Jesus if, in fact, Jesus did not raise from the dead?

Saul (Paul) tells us in 1 Corinthians ch. 15 that Jesus appeared in his resurrected body to the disciples and more than 500 people at once. Far fewer people were eyewitnesses to Lincoln’s assassination. And yet, no one questions the historicity of that event.

And why would someone like Saul so radically and quickly change his point of view if he did not have an encounter with the resurrected Jesus? Even Ananias questions Jesus and how it could be possible that Saul is a changed person.

Saul was well known for the evil that he had done. Saul was there when Stephen was stoned to death. It was well known that Saul had the authority to arrest and imprison Christians. Ananias wonders why he should go and meet someone like Saul. But Jesus tells Ananias that Saul will be a changed man.

The good work that God had just begun in Saul would be brought to completion.

Jesus tells Ananias, “Go for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.” “Go, Ananias, for I will make an enemy of the

Gospel into a proponent of the Gospel. I will make a doubter of my power and authority into a believer and preacher of my power and authority.”

So, doubting Ananias steps out in faith. He goes to Saul and his first words are words of acceptance and faith in the resurrected Jesus who transforms lives—the one who chooses us to be his instruments. He addresses him as “Brother Saul.” Ananias shares the same love, grace, and peace to Saul that God shares with us.

God chooses Saul’s mouth to be his instrument to preach the Gospel. God chooses Ananias’ hands to be the instruments that heal Saul of his blindness. And so God chooses all of us to be the instruments of his peace, love and forgiveness. He uses our hands, feet, mouths, ears, and eyes and our whole being to be the instruments of what he is doing in the world.

What human being would make up such a religion? What religion would admit that it’s foundation is laid upon people who had to overcome their own doubts? Who would be willing to suffer for anyone, let alone Jesus, if he did not raise from the dead?

When human beings make up stories and myths, there are no doubters and strugglers. The hero always displays his power himself. The heroine always gets the job done herself. But Jesus chooses the weak, the doubters, and the sinful. No one makes this stuff up. This is the work of God and we are his instruments—weak, doubtful, and sinful as we are.

This story is the story of how the persecutor Saul became the Apostle Paul. The changed name was a constant reminder of a transformed human being. At the end of our text, it says that Saul confounded people and “proved that Jesus was the Christ.”

He became the instrument to carry Jesus’ name that he was called to be. He not only realized that Christians were not liars or delusional but he realized that Christ had indeed risen from the dead. And not only that, that he continues to raise the dead, overcome doubts with the truth, and free those in bondage to sin.

Our church’s name is named after this violent Saul transformed into St. Paul. And our call is the same as his. We are called and chosen to be instruments of Christ to carry his name to the world.

Jesus died and rose again so that we would have peace with God and peace with one another. And he calls us to extend and share that peace with the world around us. Why does he chooses us who are weak, doubting, and human instruments? Perhaps we will never know. But like Paul and Ananias, God calls us to serve him.

This is not just a story of two people who were transformed by the Gospel. It is the story and picture of the purpose of the church—the purpose of our church. God has gathered us together and chosen us to share Christ’s peace, love, and forgiveness.

What a privilege to be in a church that understands her mission—and one who understands that God gathers a rich diversity of people from every nation, tribe, tongue and people—we are multiethnic community sharing Christ’s peace to a multiethnic community just as Ananias shared it with Paul and Paul with the whole world.

This is what God does. This is how we participate in what God is doing. This is our mission. This is our vision—to be instruments of God carrying Jesus’ name to all the world. We have the privilege and joy of reshaping one another’s lives with the peace that only Christ can give.