

Home Service for 5/1/2022

Welcome and Announcements

You may also find listening to some of your favorite hymns helpful in worship.

Call to Worship:

Great Spirit of God, you have healed our wounds. You have brought us from paths of hurt and anger. You have blessed our life that we might be a blessing to others. Let us worship you in great joy. Let us remember the ways you have turned our mourning into dancing. Let us give thanks to you forever. AMEN.

Opening Prayer:

God of power and might, let your love shine on us and through us to others. Take the blindness from our eyes and our hearts. Give us the joy of knowing and serving you in all that we say, think and do. In Jesus' Name, we pray. Amen

Prayer of Confession:

We rejoice in the wonder of your resurrection, O Christ, but then tend to sink back into our old ways of thinking, behaving, responding to people's needs. We can dance with the angels and all humankind on Easter Sunday, but the days following the Day of Resurrection cause us to slip back into apathy or despair. Forgive us when we so easily become distracted by our own cares and worries that we ignore the needs of others around us. Forgive us when we forget your power and love for us. Charge us up, O Lord! Set our hearts to dancing! Give us a spirit for rejoicing, willing hearts and hands for helping, voices for praising you forever! AMEN.

Words of Assurance

Sing! Shout! Rejoice! Jesus calls you to serve because of his love for you. He believes in you and all the gifts you have been given! Do not be afraid. Christ is with you always.

Read Psalm 30

I will exalt you, LORD,
for you lifted me out of the depths
and did not let my enemies gloat over me.

²LORD my God, I called to you for help,

and you healed me.
³You, LORD, brought me up from the realm of the dead;
you spared me from going down to the pit.
⁴Sing the praises of the LORD, you his faithful people;
praise his holy name.
⁵For his anger lasts only a moment,
but his favor lasts a lifetime;
weeping may stay for the night,
but rejoicing comes in the morning.
⁶When I felt secure, I said,
“I will never be shaken.”
⁷LORD, when you favored me,
you made my royal mountain^[c] stand firm;
but when you hid your face,
I was dismayed.
⁸To you, LORD, I called;
to the Lord I cried for mercy:
⁹“What is gained if I am silenced,
if I go down to the pit?
Will the dust praise you?
Will it proclaim your faithfulness?
¹⁰Hear, LORD, and be merciful to me;
LORD, be my help.”
¹¹You turned my wailing into dancing;
you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy,
¹²that my heart may sing your praises and not be silent.
LORD my God, I will praise you forever.

Prayers of the People:

Lord Jesus, we slouch in our seats. We sit back and relax. The rush of Easter is over, the excitement which carried us to Easter and to the room where Jesus appeared to the disciples is wearing off. We just aren't sure what to do now that the journey to the Cross is completed. Help us to understand that the Cross is not our ending point, but rather the pivotal point. Help us to be people of astounding faith, who have seen the light of Resurrection, who know that you have conquered death. Fear cannot claim and bind us. You have released us to serve others and witness to the glorious good news. As we have brought the names of those near and dear to us to you in prayer, help us to feel the rejuvenating power of your love

in our lives. Inspire us to move into compassionate ministries to your world. For we ask these things in the name of our Risen Lord. AMEN

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is The kingdom, and the power and the glory forever and ever. AMEN

Read the Lesson: Acts 9:1-6

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. ³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" ⁵ "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. ⁶ "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

Read the Epistle Lesson: Revelation 5:11-14

Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. ¹² In a loud voice they were saying:

"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength
and honor and glory and praise!"

¹³ Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying:

"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be praise and honor and glory and power,
for ever and ever!"

¹⁴ The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped.

Read the Gospel Lesson: John 21:1-19

Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee.^[a] It happened this way: ² Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus^[b]), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. ³ “I’m going out to fish,” Simon Peter told them, and they said, “We’ll go with you.” So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

⁴ Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

⁵ He called out to them, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?”

“No,” they answered.

⁶ He said, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.” When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

⁷ Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, “It is the Lord,” he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. ⁸ The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards.^[c] ⁹ When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

¹⁰ Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish you have just caught.” ¹¹ So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

Message

Today’s lesson reminds us that God is described in the Bible as being fond of using unlikely sources or people to accomplish his purposes. Who would have thought the tiny family of Abram would become the foundation of a mighty nation? Who could have guessed that the twelve rough-edged men would make disciples? When God does finally look to the trained religious leaders in the first century, he chooses Saul, later known as Paul. While Saul had the credentials and training for being a spiritual leader in the fledgling church, he obviously lacked the desire! He was the least likely of the rabbis to be chosen to lead and formulate early Christian

theology. But that seems to be the mode in which God operates, choosing unlikely sources to accomplish monumental purposes.

In verse 2 of the lesson it uses the phrase “that if he found any of this Way.” Do you know what this Way means? Christians during this time were called “those belonging to the Way.” That indicated what others saw in these early Christians. They saw that they were different; they had a different way of life. These Christians were characterized, not by self-centeredness, as the world is, but they were characterized by love and acceptance and understanding and tolerance. They were called, “those belonging to the Way,” the way of love. There was something about them that reminded others of Jesus, who was himself “the Way, the Truth, and the Life.”

Now let us look at this man, Saul. Who is he and where did he come from. He was educated as a rabbi by Gamaliel in Jerusalem. That means that he could relate to educated people. As the Greeks love to argue their rhetoric, he could argue with the best of them. He spoke Aramaic and Greek. That meant that he could speak to people in their own language. He was a Roman citizen through his father. It saves his life at one point. It also causes the other Roman citizens to listen to him. He was the son of a strictly orthodox Jewish father, a son of a Pharisee. He himself was a Pharisee. So, this means he had a deep love and appreciation for his Jewish faith and could easily speak to people who were rooted in Judaism. He was born in the Greek city of Tarsus and learned at the Jewish synagogue there. He was advanced beyond many in his zealotry of the law. He was a strong leader in the Jewish community. It was that zeal that led him on the road to Damascus.

Saul was passionately serious about his belief in God. He knew the Scriptures backwards and forwards. He studied the Scriptures daily and applied them to his life. Jews of those days all knew the Scriptures well, but Saul was way above average because he was college educated by the best professor in the world. He believed in God and was active with his faith, but he was wrong; he did not know God! It can be a frightening thing when people think they know the Bible and may even think they know the difference in right and wrong, but they don't know God. You see, Saul had a religion, but he didn't have a relationship with God.

The religion of Saul was an inherited religion. It was one he had learned from his father. There was one problem, Saul knew Judaism, but he didn't know God. That is the downfall of an inherited religion. There is a lesson here for us as parents and grandparents. It is important that we teach our children and our grandchildren the doctrine of Christianity. It is important that we help them understand the morals and ethics that go with our faith. But it is far more important that we introduce

them to Jesus Christ. We do not want them to inherit our religion; we want all children to meet our Savior.

Saul had a wonderful religion, but he missed have a wonderful relationship with God. In some ways it might seem unlikely for God to choose Saul to be one of the major leaders of the church, especially since he originally wanted to eliminate the Christians. However, we see that God used his background. Nobody else had quite the background he had.

God has a way of taking our backgrounds, whatever they are, and making good out of them. We may have some wonderful things about our backgrounds that have given us special skill and knowledge. Things we could be proud of. However, there may be things about our backgrounds that we are not proud of. We may just as soon forget, but God takes our background and uses it for our benefit. We may have been through some trauma in our lives. God can take that experience and use us to minister to other people who are in the middle of the same kind of trauma. We can say to them, "God brought me through and God can bring you through too."

So, here is Saul with all of this background. A background that has led him to believe that the Christians are dead wrong about what they believe. He has gotten papers from the chief priests to bring Christians bound back to Jerusalem. As he is going, he is breathing threats of murder with hatred in his heart. Then, suddenly a bright light shines around him and he is struck down. Then a voice cries out, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" He replies, "Who is it, Lord?" And Jesus answers: "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting."

Saul understood it immediately. He had been persecuting Jesus for quite some time. You may recall that Saul had stood watch over the coats while Stephen gave his defense before he was murdered. Saul had heard the testimony of who this Jesus was. Time and again, as he had arrested and persecuted the followers of "The Way," they had witnessed to him about Jesus. He knew immediately that everything he had heard was true. Suddenly he understood what Stephen had said, that Jesus had died on the cross, that he had died for our sins, for his sins.

I believe that it was at that moment Saul surrendered his life to Jesus Christ. Why do I say that? Because of the next question he asked Jesus was: "What do you want me to do?" Immediately, Saul goes from a Pharisee to disciple and from persecutor to proclaimer of Jesus Christ. We see in his question a man who had surrendered his will to the Will of Jesus Christ. Lord, What do you want me to do?

Saul cannot see. He is blind. So he is taken into Damascus and he stays there. The Lord speaks to Ananias, who is a follower of the Way, for he wanted to send him to help Saul. Ananias does not want to go, because this was not the first time he had heard that Saul was after the followers of the Way. Jesus just says, "Go. I will use him to speak before Jews and Gentiles and kings and he will suffer much for my sake." Ananias is obedient. He goes to Saul and says, "Brother Saul, the Lord has sent me to you." He doesn't pass judgement on him or pretend to be better than him. He simply accepts him as a brother of faith and as part of the community of faith.

It says that something like scales fell from Saul's eyes. He was filled with the Holy Spirit and was baptized. He had been physically and spiritually blind and now he can see!

The story of Saul becoming the apostle Paul is a great reminder that we can be bold and have great confidence in God's direction for our lives, because the Lord's thoughts are higher than our thoughts, His ways higher than our ways. The Risen Christ Jesus, our Savior, changes lives. Jesus has changed our lives by showing us great mercy and forgiving our past and forgetting our sins. Now that God has changed the past, and He is in control of both our present and future, our next step is directed by God and His will. This is good, in fact it is great! May the Risen Christ be in your lives now and forever as He gives you hope and a future. Amen.

Benediction:

Let us go forth into the world as people of the resurrection, people who can look evil in the eye and see beyond it to the sure and certain day when God shall turn all our mourning into dancing. Let us go forth in the power of the Holy Spirit and practice resurrection. Let God's people say, "AMEN!"