

“Reluctant Servants”

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. They were reluctant to believe the witness of the women. Last week, in our Gospel, we heard of how Thomas was absolutely not going to believe until he put his fingers into the wounds of Christ.

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 and immediately proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying “He is the Son of God.”

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

Now laying hands on a person and blessing him and healing him should certainly not be unpleasant nor a cause for reluctance from a man of God like Ananias. Normally, if God would have called to His servant Ananias and made this request for him to lay hands on a person and heal them, 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 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.

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 one individual who seems to make your life miserable whenever he or she opens their mouth (or walks through the door). 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, "Go, go to him." The sins of Saul of Tarsus were paid for with the blood of Christ. This wicked man named Saul is a sinner who does not deserve to be forgiven. God chose him anyway.

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, for their benefit, need to be called to repentance, but even more, for their benefit, they need to 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 God needs to punish those sinful people who cause so much trouble in this world. Bad things should happen to bad

people. That is often our desire. What God desires is repentance and for His grace to abound. Repentance, turning from the path you are currently on often seems unpleasant.

The life of St. Paul became much more difficult after Jesus entered upon the scene. However, the life of St. Paul became much better, even though it was harder and often very unpleasant, as from this time forward, the Jews who were with him persecuting the Christians now want to kill him.

That is the nature of faith. Before we are made to look at the ugliness of our sin, the thought of being made to look at the ugliness of our sin seems very unpleasant. We are very reluctant to do that on our own. We know that the Law demands that sin is to be punished. Life, after Christ comes upon the scene, is better because now we know that sin has been punished.

That is why Jesus had to be nailed to the cross. Jesus didn't stretch His arms out so that He could give the world a big hug. He was stretched out and nailed to a tree so that the punishment for the sin of Adam and all of his children would be complete. This was the only way that we could be reconciled to God. Our relationship had to be fixed.

God sent Ananias to Saul of Tarsus because Saul's relationship with God had to be fixed. So Ananias 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 through the waters of Baptism. Tell me if you have heard that one before. It's our story. Ananias is only doing what all Christians are called to do:

follow the example that Christ set for you, forgive the people who have sinned against you, and be an example for others. How can someone understand the message of undeserved forgiveness from God if they have never experienced undeserved forgiveness from the people of God?

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 see them brought 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 Jesus 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. 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.

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.

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