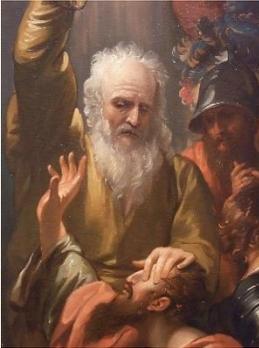


Notes for Brian's Sermon at Brentwood Presbyterian Church

Sun, Aug 25, 2019

A Radical Turnaround

(Ps 71:1-11 and Acts 9:1-19)



So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

(Acts 9:17)

Insights from the story within the story

When I chose the title of the sermon for this morning, I intended to focus on Saul becoming Paul – but then another character in the story began to fascinate me – another one of these characters who shows up, then disappears – another character urged by the Spirit to do something he didn't want to do – another character who did a radical turnaround in loyalty to his Lord – this time, it's Ananias – the Spirit calls, Ananias resists, the Spirit persists, and Ananias follows – then I found this image of the event – for me, it's so paradoxical – is the hand raised in blessing, or is it about to hit the blind persecutor of Ananias' friends in Christ? – is the facial expression that of a convinced convert or that of a doubtful disciple, dragged unwillingly into this act of acceptance? – is this the older brother wracked with mixed feelings about the one who is welcomed home with no conditions? – again, here's Luke pushing our imaginations well beyond the established and the ordinary into new realms of redemptive possibilities – to accept Saul becoming Paul, and to become an agent in that transformation, is a radical turnaround for Ananias

Provocative points to ponder – as always, too many to cram into one sermon

- This is the story of the Spirit spreading her benefits beyond the boundaries that humans, even the disciples, can imagine – those benefits, as we've noted often here at Brentwood, are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and the self-control to live into all of those gifts of the Spirit – it is a way of patient persuasion, creating space in our lives for the Spirit to work through us into the souls of others, even others that we cannot imagine being sisters and brothers in Christ
- At the heart of this radical turnaround, for both Ananias and Saul/Paul, is the ridiculous forgiveness of God – forgiveness for murderers, for executioners, for

hate-filled racists, and for any others caught in the tangled thickets of our rebellions against the Spirit's gentle and patient influence – that bears some pondering – what does it mean to create space in our imaginations for all those who God loves and wants to draw into the process of becoming part of the fellowship of the friends of Jesus?

How does this apply to our mission here at Brentwood?

In our modern culture, with its obsessive emphasis on the heroic individual, we are tempted to miss how much radical turnarounds depend on a community of support and learning – Ananias acts, with the guidance of the Spirit, as an ambassador of the community drawn into being by God's reconciling grace – Paul is incorporated into that community – he works in and through and for that community for the rest of his life – I pray and trust that Brentwood continues to be the kind of community where people can experience the radical turnaround that the Spirit generates – if you have been part of the Christian community all or most of your life, that turnaround may involve seeing the work of God differently – if you are new to the faith, or just exploring the possibilities of the faith, the turnaround may involve seeing more positive dimensions of the faith than you had previously perceived – wherever you may be on your journey to reconciliation with your Creator, we strive mightily here at Brentwood to provide a space for the Spirit to help you gain new insight and become more of a blessing to this world

My Notes

My Prayers

