

“Better call Saul”

Psalm 6....Acts 9: 1-19 April 26, 2020

Let us Pray,

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing to you Lord. Amen

Jesus Christ, His life... His death...His resurrection

Is the core, the center, the very fiber of our faith!

Right? We stand or fall...we sink or swim on these events.

In questions of life or death...

In questions of new creation or old...

At some point in our life, we must make a decision about Christ,
about Christianity ...or suffer through life with no commitment.

Sometime in each of our lives, we made a leap of faith and
accepted Jesus Christ as our savior.

After the resurrection, which we celebrated 2 weeks ago,
the disciples made their decision.

They went out and proclaimed a new kingdom.

They didn't run away and hide...or just quietly disappear.

They went out into the world.

A world that was not always that receptive.

Their courage was grounded in faith:

A faith that Christ was indeed the Son of God!

A faith that He was resurrected and alive!

A faith that he had brought to them a new way.

This morning, I'd like to take a look into the enemy camp.

Let's look at the Pharisees and Sadducees... (Sad-du-see)

Let's explore the folks that denied the resurrection ever happened.

The ones that did not and would not accept this new way.

And especially, one individual named Saul.

Saul was raised in the Jewish tradition.

He studied in Jerusalem.

He returned to Tarsus as a Rabbi.

And the teachings of Jesus come to his attention:

-He hears how Jesus loosely interprets the Jewish law.

-He hears how Jesus defies the ancient Jewish traditions.

-He hears how Jesus openly denounces the scribes and Pharisees

-And made numerous blasphemous claims.

So Saul goes to Jerusalem to get a firsthand account.

Now this is obviously after the resurrection...

This is after Jesus was crucified, died and resurrected.

So Saul listens to the teaching of Christ's disciples.

From this experience, Saul concludes:

All this is a threat to Judaism!

He concludes this is a threat to tradition!

He concludes that this is a threat to all that he has-

been taught & believed!

He concludes that this is a threat to his religion...

his upbringing...to him!

So what does he do?? Well naturally, he strikes out!

At first, perhaps just in defense.

But it eventually turns into total destruction.

This hearsay must be destroyed!

He becomes obsessed!

Saul becomes extremely dedicated in his attack to end these teachings.

We heard in our lesson this morning; he was-

“Breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord.”

Stephen becomes his first target...his first victim.

He’s stoned to death.

Next, Saul gets permission to go to Damascus in an effort to bring back Christians to Jerusalem and put them on trial.

He plans to end these teachings of Christ!

On the final day of his trip to Damascus,

Saul is suddenly struck down by a great flashing light!

A voice calls- “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”

Bewildered, he struggles for speech...

“Who are you?” He gasps...

And the voice answered: “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting”

(Pause) Here are the words, that toss Saul’s life into ruin.

Here is the slashing of Saul’s very foundation.

Here is the collapse of Saul's house of cards.

The corner stone of his beliefs is removed.

(Pause) Could it be that he had been wrong?

Had all his life been lived in error?

Had all he studied & believed been a mistake?

This isn't a mild trauma...

This is a shaking of ones very roots and beliefs!

Jesus was alive, there is no denying it.

There is no getting around it.

There is no getting around Jesus!

He has blocked the road & a new light appeared.

Saul had to think he was going mad!

This is all illogical & absurd.... but it was real!

Saul has encountered the living Lord!

And so Saul, a devout Jew....a Rabbi...a Pharisee

a persecutor of Christiansis converted!

And he is destined to become one of the greatest

of Christian apostles & missionaries.

He takes up a new road...a new way!

Saul joins the minority.

He gives up all that he has. Especially his past and his roots!

He, like the other disciples, is willing to risk his life for his new belief.

(Pause) What is this force that can so radically alter the lives of people?

What can completely turn them upside down in all their thinking?

That can even send them out in the face of death?

For Saul, it was an encounter with the living Lord.

An encounter with truth!

And I'm suggesting that this is the only thing that could have changed Saul!

He was brought to a fullness of faith.

He experienced the new creation

He experienced the living Lord, Jesus.

The living Lord that blocked Saul's path is alive today...

And He blocks our path! He stands before us.

(Pause) After the resurrection, after that first Easter Sunday...

the disciples made their decision to spread the joy of Christianity.

They went out and proclaimed a new kingdom.

They proclaimed a life eternal!

They didn't run away and hide...or just quietly disappear.

They went out into the world.

A world that was not always that receptive.

Some things remain the same, (Pause) don't they?

The world, is still not very receptive to hearing the Word of God.

Maybe sometimes we need to be "Struck down by a flashing light".

Maybe this time it's not a flashing light...(pause).maybe it's a pandemic.

Look I don't have the answers.... none of us do,

But are we being sent a message?

“Why do you persecute me?”

The disciple's courage was grounded in faith.

For Saul...well he needed a wakeup call.

Saul needed more than a nudge...he needed to be knocked down

Knocked down to the point he couldn't see for three days!

Knocked down to the point he couldn't eat or drink for three days!

Knocked down to the point that he saw the Light.

The true Light...and a new way of life and a new Kingdom.

We've all been knocked down by the COVID 19 pandemic.

The world has been knocked down by the COVID 19 pandemic.

This isn't a mild trauma...

This is a shaking of ones very roots and beliefs!

Some of us respond like the disciples, proclaiming goodness,
love, peace and offering help.

Like the disciples, our courage is grounded in our faith.

(Pause) And for some of us, well...we react the same way Saul did...

“This is a threat to our way of life.”

“This is a threat to our tradition.”

And we march onto Damascus.... But Jesus is blocking the path.

Sometimes Jesus steps in when we don't want him too.

(pause) And knocks us down!

May we go forth with the same eagerness and perseverance as the disciples...and eventually Saul.

(pause) **May we too go forward with courage in faith.**

(Pause) So what is this force that can so radically alter the lives of people?

(Pause) What can completely turn them upside down in all their thinking?

(Pause) Remember Jesus's words from John, chapter 16 verse 33

“Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world”.

Amen!