

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Seventh Sunday After Trinity, July 14, 2024

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 382 (26:6) 417, 405, 15

Lessons: Isaiah 43:8-13; Acts 15:5-21; Mark 11:27-33

Text: Acts 9:1-20

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Fellow Redeemed in Christ,

A man named Saul was born about the same time that Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary. Saul was born in Tarsus, a city of the province of Cilicia in the eastern part of Asia Minor. His father and mother were Jews. His father also was a Roman citizen and therefore Saul was a free-born Roman citizen. This was an important distinction in those days. Saul was brought up according to the strict, self-righteous religion of the Pharisees. He had a very fine education and knew the Old Testament Scriptures very well. He could speak and write the Greek language as one who had learned it from childhood. According to Jewish custom he also learned a trade, that of making tents from goat hair.

This man the Lord chose to be his servant to bring the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ to the Gentile nations. He was also called Paul after a trip to Cyprus as we are told in Acts 13:9. The Lord made this man the greatest missionary of all times and by inspiration of the Holy Spirit Paul wrote most of the New Testament epistles.

We learn from our text that

HE WHO ONCE PERSECUTED CHRIST BEGAN TO PREACH CHRIST AND HIM CRUCIFIED.

1. Saul's effort to violently destroy Christianity;
2. Saul's miraculous conversion;
3. The beginning of his ministry of preaching the Gospel.

“Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. He went to the high priest 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.” As a Pharisee Paul was brought up to regard Christianity with its doctrine of God’s free grace and salvation in Christ as a false teaching. He did everything he could to destroy Christianity. We are told, *“Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison,”* Acts 8:3. When Stephen the first Christian martyr was stoned to death, *“Saul was there, giving approval to his death,”* Acts 8:1. When Paul wrote to the Galatian believers, he told them, *“you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it,”* Galatians 1:13. Paul told Timothy that *“I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man,”* 1 Timothy 1:13. So also our text tells us that he went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus to get permission to seek out any Christians and take them back as prisoners to Jerusalem.

In his unbelief Saul was just like a wild animal threatening to murder anyone who believed in Christ. He was totally under the power of Satan, totally dedicated to destroying Christianity. But we are told about **Saul’s miraculous conversion** on this same trip to Damascus.

“As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’” Suddenly the Lord interrupted Saul’s plans to wipe out Christianity. The Lord made his appearance known in a bright light from heaven. It was a light so brilliant that it left Saul blind for three days and his sight was restored only by a miracle.

The Lord asked Saul why he was persecuting him. Saul had always thought that he was serving the Lord by trying to wipe out Christianity. Here he found out that he was actually fighting against Jesus Christ himself by persecuting believers in Christ. When Saul asked, ***“Who are you, Lord,”*** Jesus answered, ***“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.”*** Christ and his believers are united by an inseparable bond. To be against Christianity, to oppose Christ’s followers, is to also be against Christ who is the Head of the Holy Christian Church. Paul wrote about Christ and the Holy Christian Church: ***“There is one body and one Spirit - just as you were called to one hope when you were called - one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all,”*** Ephesians 4:4-5.

Paul had tried to earn God’s favor by his own works of righteousness according to the law. The Bible tells us, ***“no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin,”*** Romans 3:20. As a result of trying to earn salvation by works, there is no rest for the soul. The true rest for our souls is to be found alone in Christ. We ***“are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus,”*** Romans 3:24. We must be brought to faith by the work of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace. Saul was brought to faith on the road to Damascus when Christ revealed himself to him in a miraculous way. Here the self-righteous persecutor of the Church became a humble believer in Christ. Here Saul was enlightened by the Holy Spirit to know Christ as his Savior and Lord.

Jesus told Saul, ***“Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”*** We want to learn now about **the beginning of Saul’s ministry of preaching the Gospel.**

“The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.” The men led Saul into Damascus to the house of a man named Judas who lived on Straight Street. It was here that the Lord directed ***“a disciple named Ananias.”*** The Lord told him what had happened to Saul and that he was to ***“place his hands on him to restore his sight.”*** Ananias’ faith was severely tested by this command of the Lord, and he said to the Lord, ***“I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem.”*** He also knew that Saul had come to Damascus to take believers in Christ as prisoners to Jerusalem. The Lord then told Ananias what he wanted him to do. ***“Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”*** Here we have an example of the omniscience of Jesus. He knows all things. He had Saul’s life all laid out for him. God chose Saul (who later was known as Paul) to become the great missionary to the Gentiles. First Paul was to preach to the Jews in the Gentile nations. But the Jews for the most part rejected Paul’s preaching of Christ Crucified. That’s when Paul and Barnabas told the Jews, ***“We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles,”*** Acts 13:46. Jesus also knew what Paul would have to suffer when the Gospel he preached was rejected and did happen that he had to suffer much. One example of this happened on his first missionary journey. ***“They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead,”*** Acts 14:19b. It was shortly after this when Paul said what all believers in Christ should know, ***“We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,”*** Acts 14:22. Every one of us as believers in Christ should expect that the Lord will give us tribulations and

hardships when we are persecuted for the sake of confessing Christ as our Savior. Jesus also told Ananias that he had chosen Saul to testify before kings. So it was when Paul later in his ministry preached Christ to the Roman governor Felix and his successor Festus and later to King Agrippa.

“Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord - Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here - has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit’. Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.” After spending several days with the believers in Damascus, we are told, ***“At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.”*** This is how Paul began his ministry of preaching Christ Crucified. He told the Jews in the synagogues that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God. This is what the angel Gabriel told the Virgin Mary, ***“So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God,”*** Luke 1:35. Paul didn’t have to study years under some philosopher to learn what he should preach. Human reason did not reveal what Paul should preach. He was miraculously brought to faith in Jesus and the Holy Spirit enlightened him to preach the truth. What a marvelous privilege it was for Paul to preach and teach in the Gospel ministry!

We were not converted in the same manner as Paul was, but to those of us who believe in Christ something just as wonderful has happened. Paul wrote about it, ***“He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life,”*** Titus 3:5b-7. We ought never to cease to marvel at God’s undeserved love and mercy given to us for Jesus’ sake in bringing us to faith in Jesus. We ought never to forget that God the Holy Spirit brought us to faith for a purpose also. That purpose is that while here on earth we might serve the Lord, both in our private lives and also in publicly confessing Jesus as our Savior. Just as Paul devoted his life to preaching Christ, so we should consider the spreading of the Gospel message our business also. It is in fact the one most important thing we have to do in this life. It is such a precious message we have to help spread to other people. It tells about Jesus as the Son of God and his priesthood for our salvation. The Bible tells us, ***“He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins, and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself,”*** Hebrews 7:25-27 (NASB) We can tell other people that they don’t have to try to please God with their miserable good works to earn salvation. Jesus has done it all for them. ***“He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world,”*** 1 John 2:2. We can tell others what Jesus said, ***“my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day,”*** John 6:40.

Just as we rejoice in these Gospel truths, we can bring others the good news also. We pray:

***“So may we when our work is done
Together stand before Your throne
And joyful hearts and voices raise
In one united song of praise,
With all the bright celestial host,
To Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.”
Amen.
(Hymn 493:4)***

(Reprinted from a Ministry By Mail sermon for June 15, 2008)