

May 5, 2019  
Rev. Kerry Smith

Acts 9:13-20     The Unexpected Acts of God  
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Acts 9:13-20     New Revised Standard Version

But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name." But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." 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." And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength. For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God."

Today we celebrate that four amazing 6th graders, Eli, Lola, Teal and Wes, are completing their Confirmation journey. They are going to stand in front of this family of faith and make real their faith. They will say yes to the promises made on their behalf at their baptism. A few weeks ago we were talking about belief in Confirmation class and I asked them if they ever disagreed with any of my beliefs. They were a little shy to respond, but one of the students said that they thought that I talked too long and one student said that I was too boring. I told them thank you for the feedback, but those really aren't beliefs. Despite their comments, I know that these students do agree with me on the most important beliefs of our church.

Confirmation has been interesting this year because of what is going on in the larger United Methodist Church. The Methodist Church, in the Big Church sense, is unrecognizable to me or to our Confirmation students. The four amazing Confirmation students told me that they don't want to join the United Methodist Church in its current state. They were united in their desire to join Greenland Hills because this is a church that they want to be a part of. They will join Greenland Hills United Methodist Church as the Church that God is calling her to be. This is a church that stands up to injustice and says we will not comply. This is a church that believes that the image of God is in all people and all people should be allowed to be married in this place and to be a pastor in this place. At Greenland Hills, we fight for what is right in the name of loving God and loving our neighbor.

We believe that the Gospel of Jesus the Christ disturbs our lives and makes us do everything we can do to prevent hate and promote love. There is a story in the Bible about some people who had their lives disturbed for God. One was Saul who "breathed threats and murder against the disciples" of Jesus. He was one of the bad guys. He was on his way to Damascus to look for Jesus spies when a light from heaven flashed around him blinding him. He heard Jesus asking why he was persecuting him. In our lives today, I wish that it were so easy for bad people to be stopped and to see the error of their ways.

Ananias is in our story as well. He is a good guy who followed Jesus. God tells Ananias to go to Saul and to pray for him, but Ananias knows about Saul and he doesn't want to go. READ SCRIPTURE

The Gospel of Jesus the Christ disturbs our lives. It disturbs our lives when we feel called to do something that we don't think that we can do. Whether it is Saul or Ananias or the four wonderful students being Confirmed today. Being a part of a church disturbs lives and it will disturb the lives of these Confirmation students. Church is a community of people where you become friends with people you would not have chosen as friends for yourself. There are people in this place from different backgrounds, with different professions, different beliefs. By being a part of this family of faith, you can share the gifts God has given to others.

Our God is a God who changes lives. Our God is a God who turns Saul from someone who "breathed threats and murder against the disciples" of Jesus to someone who proclaimed Jesus so that all who heard him were amazed. God changes lives. Ananias was skeptical about Saul's ability to change. We get that because we are skeptical too. Experience teaches us to be cautious about people's ability to change. We even have a phrase for that. We say it is hard to teach an old dogs new tricks. Ananias felt uneasy about reaching out to Saul, but he did it. He remained open to what God was doing. There is a new reality because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In our story, Saul is blinded by the light. When his sight is restored, he has a new way of seeing where all are welcome and invited into the light of God's love.

Ananias and Saul were natural enemies. Saul had stood guard over the execution of Stephen, the first Christian martyr and one of Ananias's brothers in faith. God had to remind Ananias that Saul was an instrument that God had chosen to bring God's name before all people. God can use anyone to share love. I once had an acquaintance I didn't like. I thought he was just a little rough around the edges. He would tell you what he thought about someone, he wouldn't hide behind being nice. One day I was with this person and we saw someone who was homeless. My acquaintance treated that homeless person with love and kindness in a way that I did not think was possible. People filled with God's love are full of surprises. Saul became Paul, an apostle whose witness changed the spread of faith in Christ around the world.

My mom and stepdad moved to Dallas almost two years ago. My mom, who has been a Methodist my entire life, started coming to this church. I tried to convince her to go to another church because it is weird to preach to your mom every Sunday. But, she didn't want to go to another church. She wanted to come here, she wanted to be a part of this family of faith. Not because of me, but because of all of you. She knew that she could be herself in this place with you and you would always love and accept her and

give her support. Brene Brown says that true belonging doesn't require you to change who you are; it requires you to be who you are."<sup>1</sup> When my stepdad went on hospice this week, I knew that this family of faith would hold my mom and my stepdad in love.

Thank you.

Ananias was told by God that Saul was an instrument to bring God's name before all. We are called to be that instrument as well, sharing God's love with everyone we see. At Greenland Hills, we believe God's grace has enabled us to experience the wideness of God's love, which leads us deeper down the path of holiness. It is a grace that grabs ahold of us and won't let us go. It is a grace that welcomes us as we are. It is a grace that disturbs our lives. It is a grace that tells us that every one is beloved, no one is turned away, and Christ's table is wide enough for everyone.

We live in a world torn apart by war, violence and famine, but God's call to work for peace is unwavering. We live in a nation where leaders wrestle with the reality of climate change, and God's call to work for justice is unwavering. At Greenland Hills, God's call to love each other is unwavering. We must live out our faith by seeking justice, pursuing peace, and loving our neighbors. May these amazing Confirmands remind us how to dream big because they dream of a world where we all seek justice, pursue peace, and love our neighbors.

I love the song Amazing Grace. My favorite verse says, "Through many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come; 'tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home." I find that grace in this place. Thank you for being open and loving as God disturbs us all. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.globoforce.com/gfblog/2017/true-belonging-brene-brown-braving-wilderness/>