



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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Here I Am, Lord

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Psalm 40:1-8

Acts 9:10-19

Let me tell you about a man named Bubba. Bubba was quite a religious man, and everybody loved Bubba.

He lived in a little apartment, on the ground floor, but he was getting on in years. Every night he prayed to God, “Dear Lord, it’s old Bubba; I’m ready, Lord, here I am, ready to come home.”

Every night he prayed that prayer, and since Bubba was a little hard of hearing, he figured God might be, too; so, he did pray a little on the loud side. Bubba’s bedroom was on the front side of the apartment, so anybody walking by could hear him.

One night, some of his friends thought they’d have a little fun with Bubba. They waited outside his window, and when they heard him start to pray, they walked to the door and knocked.

It was late, and when Bubba got to the door, he asked, “Who is it?” And they answered, “This is the Lord’s angel, come for old Bubba!”

There was a silence, and then from inside, “Old Bubba don’t live here no more!”

It’s a funny story, but there’s a truth to it that’s not so funny.

When God does call, many are more like Bubba than Ananias in our story this morning.

Ananias was also a very religious man, a Jew who was a leader in the growing Christian community in Damascus.

The story says that the Lord spoke to him in a vision, called him by name, “Ananias. Go to the street named Straight, to the house of Judas, and find the man Saul of Tarsus.”

Saul, Saul of Tarsus. I imagine that name sent a chill through Ananias. Because Ananias probably knew that his own name was on the top of Saul’s list.

You see, Saul was coming to Damascus to arrest those Jews, like Ananias, who belonged to the group that followed Jesus of Nazareth.

Was there silence on the other side of the door? Did Ananias still live there? Ananias answers, “Here I am.”

Ananias, this is the only time we ever hear of him, but his answer to God’s call, “Here I am, Lord,” has quite a history in the Bible.

It was Moses’ answer when God called him at the burning bush.

God calls Abraham: Here I am.

God calls Jacob: Here I am.

God calls Samuel: Here I am.

God calls Isaiah: Here I am.

God calls Mary, the mother of Jesus: Here I am.

They were all living the words of the psalmist: *“Here I am...I delight to do your will, O my God...”*

I think the first thing to note here is that God calls us by name when God has something for us to do, and I’ve come to believe, to understand that God calls us by name to help us, to remind us who we are and whose we are for what needs to be done.

In this big, booming, internet world where we worry about identity theft, for so many of us, it’s not that our Christian identity gets stolen, we simply lose our identity, we misplace it.

We have forgotten who we are as disciples of Jesus Christ, and when we don’t know who we are, we don’t know why we are here; truly what it means to be lost.

God calls you and me by name to remind us that we are his, his creation, for his good purposes, and yes, at times, our faith is unsure, trust is tentative, love is cautious: You see that as Ananias argued with God about this call.

But when God calls you and me by name, it is the surround sound of amazing grace that says God has something special for each of us and that we can do it, not in our power, but through the power of God.

Arthur Ashe, the great tennis player, an extraordinary human being, said in a speech, “True heroism is remarkably sober, very undramatic. It is not the urge to surpass all others at whatever cost, but the urge to serve others at whatever cost.”

To put it in Presbyterian terms, as we say in our Book of Order, *“The Church is to be a community of faith, entrusting itself to God alone, even at the risk of losing its life.”*

God calls to Ananias in a vision to go to the street called Straight and find a man named Saul, even at the risk of losing his own life.

Now let me be clear here. A vision is not some prediction of the future that is inescapable, not some fatalistic what-will-be-will-be kind of talk.

A vision from God is when we see our lives clearly: who we are and how things are and what could be different and what we might need to do about it.

Bubba or Ananias?

The vision for Ananias was simply a clear direction to go, where to go, who to go to, and what to do when he got there. The vision was to go to that one man. Saul had centered on himself, and he had built a barrier to God, literally; he was blind, didn't know where he was; he was lost.

Ananias had Christ at the center of his life, and he was called to build a bridge to Saul. Ananias did not know all of God's plan, we never do.

Ananias had every good reason not to go, but Ananias went; his answer to God, like all the other heroes of the faith, “Here I am”.

And you and me when God calls: Bubba or Ananias?

Brennan Manning says in his wonderful book, “The Ragamuffin Gospel”: *“Most of us spend considerable time putting off the things we should be doing, or we would like to do, or we want to do but are afraid to do.”*

We are afraid of failure...Each of us pays a heavy price for our fear of falling flat on our face.

There is no growth in Jesus Christ without some difficulty and fumbling. If we are to keep on growing, we must keep on risking failure throughout our lives.”

Faith is a risking business. That’s the essence of the call that came to Ananias.

Yes, Ananias surely feared for his life. But because of him, Saul the Assassin became Paul the Ambassador and the gospel has journeyed across the centuries from the room in that house on the street named Straight to your room on the street where you live.

Think about it, because of Ananias, people around the world claim Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

God calls us to the same faith-risking business as we go to our street named Straight, but are we afraid to entrust our lives to God?

God calls you and me to find the Saul in our world with a hope-filled heart, but we often hesitate, afraid someone may take advantage of us.

God calls us to love the enemy Saul we find out there and even to love the Saul we find within us and maybe that’s what we are most afraid of.

We have been hurt and we have hurt others. We have been betrayed and we have betrayed others.

God sees inside of us and how terribly confused we are by a world that makes so little sense at times.

God knows how easily frightened we are by events over which we have no control.

Like Jill Duffield, Editor of the *Presbyterian Outlook* says in her prayer, *“We come to you, Lord of all, exhausted by the current state of our life together, uncertain how to make it better, utterly dependent on your grace to show us the way. Grant us the vision of your promised future and give us the courage to take hold of it, no matter what we must do to be the witnesses to Jesus Christ...bearers of light and life and peace. We trust the One who has called us to do this.”*

God calls to the Ananias in us to go to the Sauls among us, and it's really not a street call straight, it's a street called suffering...

We know those streets where there are those overwhelmed by disaster, some made miserable by false hopes, some deceived by false prophets, some find their lives empty of love, empty of meaning.

We know those streets where some are hungry, homeless, oppressed, exploited, abused; those streets in which people kill and destroy each other and helpless, innocent bystanders, too.

Yes, we live in comfortable places, and it's easy to become comfortable with the world around us; but the challenge of the incarnation is that we must learn to be comfortable being in those uncomfortable places with those people who make us uncomfortable.

Authentic faith is always like that. All of us have to step out in faith, responding to God's call for our lives to be better and to make life better for others.

What I mean is this, like Ananias, to have the courage to say, "Here I am, Lord": To give the life and love of Christ to all the people I meet until all people and all nations know the length and breadth and height and depth of God's undying love in Jesus Christ.

Here I am, Lord.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.



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