



GPS GUIDE: MAY 30, 2021

Grow. Pray. Study

First Sunday after Pentecost

Sermon: Catching Sight of the Gospel

Acts 9: 1-19a

Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." He answered, "Here I am, Lord." The Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tar-sus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." 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.

Monday: Read Acts 22:1-21

Paul's travels, preaching Christ all over the Roman Empire, made him some very obsessive enemies. Seeing him in the Temple in Jerusalem, they stirred up a mob scene so violent that Roman soldiers had to rescue Paul (Acts 21:27-36). But, far from intimidated, Paul saw this as a chance to tell the mob of his life-long passionate loyalty to God, and the meeting with Jesus that changed his life. Paul told them about a disciple named Ananias who conveyed God's call to him. Acts 9:10-18 also told the story, but from Ananias' perspective, showing the courage and faith it took for him to go to Paul, a man who had come to town to imprison and maybe kill him. Has God ever called you to do something good even though it scared you and called for some courage? If God called you to an "Ananias" mission today, how do you think you would respond?

Prayer: Lord, if Ananias had said "no" he would have missed the chance to be part of something great. Help me not to miss your call or fail to answer. Amen.

Tuesday: Read Acts 25:9-12, 26:1-32

Paul was imprisoned in Roman custody for two years. Then a new Roman governor, Porcius Festus, saw it as good politics to please the Jewish leaders by sending Paul back to Jerusalem. But that journey still risked ambush. Paul, born in Tarsus and therefore a Roman citizen, used his legal right to appeal to Caesar. This assured him a trip to Rome under Roman protection (albeit as a prisoner). His strong testimony to Jesus triggered strong reactions in Festus and King Agrippa. We sometimes say, "God doesn't call the equipped." It's true that God isn't dependent on our human abilities or credentials. But Paul's final journey showed God using Paul's training as a Pharisee, his Roman citizenship by birth, and his passionate Christian witness - a strikingly unique set of attributes that Peter, John, nor James would have had. What qualities do you bring to your service for God that may allow you to serve in ways others might not be able to?

Prayer: Lord, guide me and strengthen me to do the tasks you set before me each day. Amen.

Wednesday: Read Acts 28:1-16

Sent off to Rome on a Mediterranean sailing ship, Paul experienced a shipwreck. Paul and his guards wintered on Malta. The next spring, when he reached Rome, a company of Christians welcomed him. Having invested time and effort in major cities like Corinth and Ephesus, now Paul saw first-hand the results of that focus. He had never been to Rome, yet as he arrived, Luke wrote, "the brothers and sisters there heard about us, [and] they came as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us." Imagine the flood of satisfied joy reflected in the words, "When Paul saw them, he gave thanks to God and was encouraged." When have you seen the time and effort you invested in others make a difference, perhaps larger than you ever dreamed? In what people or faithful causes are you currently investing?

Prayer: God, for all your work in and through my life, I give thanks and am encouraged. Amen.

Thursday: Read Luke 19:1-10

Jesus openly bucked social boundaries by saying, "Zacchaeus, come down; I must stay in your home today." He offered this outcast a personal friendship and made it real by sharing his hospitality. He told the grumbling crowd (many of whom Zacchaeus had probably cheated) that he "came to seek and save the lost." Zacchaeus showed a profound heart change, one that no doubt paid back the money to many who had grumbled about Jesus going to be "the guest of a sinner." Zacchaeus was so eager to learn more about Jesus that as a wealthy public citizen he climbed a tree to offset his shortness. Jesus was so eager to reach Zacchaeus that he very publicly invited himself to a meal at the house of one of the most despised "sinners" in town. What parts of your social dignity and status are you willing to lay aside to "see" Jesus more fully, or to reach others with Jesus' love?

Prayer: Lord, thank you that even as I seek you, you have been seeking me. Amen.

Friday: Read Psalm 34: 1-10

What does it mean to "taste and see" the goodness of the Lord? The word translated as "taste," means "to try something by experiencing it." The psalm singer prods the readers to try God's goodness for themselves and experience it as one would taste a new food. Tasting is one of our five senses. Seeing is another. We see the goodness of God powerfully displayed in the created world. Remember that in Genesis 1, after each creative act, God "saw" that it was good. And at the end of the creation story, God saw that creation was not just good, but that it was "very good." Psalm 34 encourages us to experience God for ourselves and to open our eyes and see the goodness of God that is all around us. When have you experienced something good that God was doing in your life? Where do you need to open your eyes and "see" God's goodness in the world around you?

Prayer: God, help me to sense your goodness in my life and in the lives of others. Amen.

Saturday: Sing or read the lyrics to "Amazing Grace" (Easily found on a Google search) Amazing Grace is an autobiographical hymn written by John Newton – a slave ship captain turned minister. Newton experienced a conversion and began devoting his life to the gospel: preaching God's justice for all people and working as an activist to end the slave trade. The famous first stanza of the hymn speaks to the power of God to open our eyes and help us "see" and therefore follow in God's ways. Have you ever had what might be described as a conversion in your faith? A time when you felt lost? Blind to God's ways? How has your study of scripture, worship, fellowship, and out-reach changed your life?

Prayer: Change me, O God, until I reflect your goodness and mercy. Amen.



FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH BIRMINGHAM
(Disciples of Christ)