

## **Act of Change**

Acts of Hope: Part 2 “Act of Change”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – May 1, 2022

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter

**Readings:** Acts 9:1-20

**Reflection:** Psalm 30

**Greeting:** Surely God is my salvation. I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord is my strength and my song. He has become my salvation. Praise the Lord! (*Isaiah 12:2*)

**Prayer:** Almighty God, through your only Son you overcame death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life. Grant that we who celebrate our Lord’s resurrection, by the renewing of your Spirit, arise from the death of sin to the life of righteousness; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Reflection:** Psalm 30

*I will extol you, O LORD, for you have drawn me up, and did not let my foes rejoice over me. O LORD my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me. O LORD, you brought up my soul from Sheol, restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit. Sing praises to the LORD, O you his faithful ones, and give thanks to his holy name. For his anger is but for a moment; his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning. As for me, I said in my prosperity, “I shall never be moved.” By your favor, O LORD, you had established me as a strong mountain; you hid your face; I was dismayed. To you, O LORD, I cried, and to the LORD I made supplication: “What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the Pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it tell of your faithfulness? Hear, O LORD, and be gracious to me! O LORD, be my helper!” You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, so that my soul may praise you and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever. (Psalm 30 NRSV\*)*

We read the words of Psalm 30 and hear of change through God. We hear of how God helps us in our time of need. In what ways do you give thanks for God’s love? How can you share that love with others? How do you celebrate God’s forgiveness? How do you show forgiveness to others? How do you share in the joy of our Risen Savior?

**Prayer:** O God, our bread, our milk, and our honey: In the resurrection of your Son you have brought us to your table. Feed us with your plenty and enlarge our table for all the hungry. Help us with our doubts and fears and strengthen us in love as we come before you in prayer. May you guide us in all things; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Alleluia.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

### **Sermon:**

Our scripture reading for today comes from the Common English Bible. Our reading for today comes from Acts chapter 9 verses 1 through 20.

*Meanwhile, Saul was still spewing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest, seeking letters to the synagogues in Damascus. If he found persons who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, these letters would authorize him to take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. During the journey, as he approached Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven encircled him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice asking him, "Saul, Saul, why are you harassing me?" Saul asked, "Who are you, Lord?" "I am Jesus, whom you are harassing," came the reply. "Now get up and enter the city. You will be told what you must do." Those traveling with him stood there speechless; they heard the voice but saw no one. After they picked Saul up from the ground, he opened his eyes but he couldn't see. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind and neither ate nor drank anything. In Damascus there was a certain disciple named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision, "Ananias!" He answered, "Yes, Lord." The Lord instructed him, "Go to Judas' house on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul. He is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias enter and put his hands on him to restore his sight." Ananias countered, "Lord, I have heard many reports about this man. People say he has done horrible things to your holy people in Jerusalem. He's here with authority from the chief priests to arrest everyone who calls on your name." The Lord replied, "Go! This man is the agent I have chosen to carry my name before Gentiles, kings, and Israelites. I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." Ananias went to the house. He placed his hands on Saul and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord sent me—Jesus, who appeared to you on the way as you were coming here. He sent me so that you could see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Instantly, flakes fell from Saul's eyes and he could see again. He got up and was baptized. After eating, he regained his strength. He stayed with the disciples in Damascus for several days. Right away, he began to preach about Jesus in the synagogues. "He is God's Son," he declared. (Acts 9:1-20 CEB+)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Last week we looked at going out and preaching the message of how Christ can change hearts and lives. This week we look at an act of change itself. We have the story of Saul, who will be known as Paul, someone we are familiar with for writing a majority of the text that we

have in the New Testament. And we see two lives changed, where we often only focus on the one. On the one hand, we have Saul who is fighting against the believers in Christ, an upstart group that is upsetting the traditional authorities. And so, Saul is looking to get rid of these upstarts. And on his way to Damascus, Saul hears a voice and it's the voice of Jesus asking him why he is persecuting his followers. With this, Saul is struck blind. So, he goes into Damascus and waits. Then Ananias is given a message to go see Saul, to lay hands on him and heal him. And Ananias isn't sure he should go, because he's heard what Saul is doing. He thinks this is a bad idea, that this isn't the type of person he should be going to see and heal. But the Lord says he's got plans so Ananias should go. So Ananias goes and in the name of Christ he heals Saul. Saul's response is to go up and get baptized and to begin preaching the good news in the synagogues. "He is God's son," he declared. Now, the reason I see there are two changes here was because we have the one that we always focus on Saul. Saul is against the church. Then he is struck blind and when healed he realizes his mistake and goes and begins preaching about a resurrected Christ.

But there's another change that happens here. And we think it's that change that we may actually be able to relate to more in many ways. It's the change we have an Ananias. Because Ananias is afraid to go and heal this man because of everything he's done. Because he isn't the right type of person to belong. Because he's a threat. But Ananias is convinced to go and heal him anyway. Because despite Ananias' human misgivings, Christ is out to change hearts and lives and knows that the only way for people to change is to be given a chance to change. And that's the change that you see in Ananias. That he goes and he heals Saul because he is convinced by Christ that it's the right thing to do. Now, the reason that this struck me is because I think we can all feel like Ananias at times. When we think about who to share the good news with, who to offer our support to, we don't think of someone who's actively working against us, who is actively trying to stop us from doing good. Because too often the default response is "he got what he deserved. He persecuted the church he should be struck blind." But the problem we run into is how does that give Saul a chance to change his heart and his life? If we aren't willing to open the door to change, how can we expect people to want that change? There's something fascinating for me in all of this in that we have the unexpectedness of Saul being chosen as someone to reach out to the people and the unexpectedness of having Ananias have to go and heal him. That one man was trapped in his hatred, wanting to stamp out anything that was different from what he thought was right. The other afraid to address someone that had been so misguided. But what I see in this is that both of them needed Christ's help to be able to love, to be able to change their lives in love. In an odd way, these two men needed each other. Saul needing Ananias to come and lay hands on him, so that he could see again, so that he could be healed to go out and do the work he needed to do. We have Ananias needing to understand that he has to reach out, even to people he's not sure of. The commonality is that they both needed to open themselves up to a deeper love in Christ.

Too often we get hung up on the idea that we are supposed to be reaching out to the right people and that the wrong people will never listen. That the wrong people will never be able to change because they're so convinced of their ways. But by doing so, we deny Christ the ability to change hearts and lives. The problem that we run into is that if we aren't willing to open ourselves up to change, we can't let others experience that change through us. Because we are instruments of God's love and God's grace and God's mercy when we open ourselves up to Christ. When we talk about communion we talk about it as an open table, open to all people who are seeking God. But how often are we an open people, open to helping anyone who even slightly begins to turn towards God? One who hesitantly peeks around the corner to see what might be there. Do we see that person looking around that edge of faith with hope that they have come to see how their hearts and lives can be changed in Christ? Or do we see them with suspicion, wondering what they are up to? Are we wondering how they're going to try to take our faith away from us? And the truth is, that's not the issue that we face. Because our faith isn't that others are trying to steal it from us. It's that others need the hope and love of Christ. That others need the message of our risen Savior. That we all need that love, that we all need that grace, but we have to be willing to be the messengers to let others know that it's there for them. Which means accepting it in our hearts fully and completely. That we may run into people that we would never expect to be changed. We may come into contact with people who we feel are so lost they could never be found. It's then that we have to remember Saul, breathing hatred and violence. He sees the error of his ways and he changes. But he changes when someone comes to offer him mercy in the name of Christ.

That's the call for all of us. Because we are all called to offer that mercy. We are all called to share that love. We are all called to be a people of hope, a people of light, and a people of change. So, my message for you this day is to live your life in a way that you are always looking for a way to introduce people to Christ. Even if it is just cracking the door open just a little bit, every act of mercy counts. Every display of love counts. Every act of change can bring about something wonderful and beautiful, as long as we are willing to look past our own fears, our own judgments, and our own dismissal of others. It is then we are able to love the way that Christ loves, seeing all as worthy of repentance. Seeing all as being deserving of forgiveness of sins. Seeing all as being capable of changing hearts and lives. That we may be instruments of change. That Christ can change us to be more than we ever could apart from Christ. And that Jesus strengthens us in our hope and in our faith to endure anything, and to be able to reach out and to give others mercy so that they too may change hearts and lives. In that we can see how an act of change can change us all to desire God's love even more. Amen.

**Prayer of Confession and Pardon:** God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

**Offering:** If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

### **Lord's Prayer**

**Dismissal with Blessing:** May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### **Our Current Series – Acts of Hope**

Our current series will be looking at the Acts of the Apostles during the Easter season, with each week bringing a new act for us to look at.

April 24th – Act of Witness – Acts 5:17-32

May 1st – Act of Change – Acts 9:1-20

May 8th – Motherly Act – Acts 9:36-43

May 15th – Act of Acceptance – Acts 11:1-18

May 22nd – Called to Act – Acts 16:9-15

May 29th – Unexpected Act – Acts 16:16-34

June 5th – Act of the Spirit – Acts 2:1-21

**Prayer List**

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup Ambulance Crew		Angie Veach	Eric Veach
Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney
Nancy Hoke	Don Wells	Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart
Ronnie Winstead	Dwight Parsons	Lauren Stewart	Phyllis Gable
Sage Martin	Dalton McFarland	Ruth Ann Finley	Jodie Bunch
Tom Finley	Laura Carlen	Judy McCellan	Rosie Chancellor
Susie Callahan	Kenny Holmes	Ted Marrs	Darrell Quick
Chuck Hogan	Brittany Gilbert	Mammoser Family	Family of Albert White
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Wayne Carrell	
Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith	Bonnie Hite	Sue & Bob Smyser
Larry Thompson	Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer	Martha Roberts
Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte		

Rev Camron D St.Michael

<https://stmichael.pw>

cdstmichael@outlook.com

(316)530-3182 (call or text)

PO Box 54, Charleston IL, 61920

\* Scripture quotations are from New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

+ Scripture quotations are from the Common English Bible, Copyright © 2011 by Common English Bible.