

A Baptism Sermon
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Prayer: “The preacher must first draw from secret prayers what he will later pour out in holy sermons; he must first grow hot within before he speaks words that are in themselves cold.” Thomas of Celano, citing St Francis

17 So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” 18 And immediately *something* like *fish* scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized; 19 and he took food and was strengthened.

Now for several days he was with the disciples who were in Damascus, 20 and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, ^[a]saying, “He is the Son of God.” . . . and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

Without apology, I offer this baptismal sermon. I note first of all that it has been my privilege twice in the this month to walk two candidates for baptism through the significance³ of Christian baptism—which is deliver baptism and which is administered through immersion upon profession of faith. Note also that today the forces of evil suffer yet another defeat in the ongoing eradication of evil which is God’s resolve and purpose. For God is not merely saving souls one by one, or two by two; no, he is taking ground from the enemy. This is an auspicious day of victory for the Lord ! We are living in trying times and it is good of the Lord to give us this occasion at this moment. When things are awful on our border, and awful in Afghanistan—beyond deplorable and beyond reprehensible. In answer to which, we, this day, answer with Kingdom work, Kingdom building.

So Ananias instructed and persuaded by the Lord goes to the place where Paul is staying and engages in a most portentous series of actions: **laying hands upon him** he prays for his sight (he had indeed lost his sight during the appearance!) and for the infilling of the Holy Spirit (having realized that this man was a **chosen instrument of god who was to carry my (Jesus’) name before the Gentiles**—this mission was not Paul’s brainchild!). Paul arose **and was baptized and taking some food** (he was completing a three day fast of food and water) **he was strengthened.** (vv. 17-18)

When I say, portentous, I mean it: Saul, a true Pharisee, after confirmation by Ananias who said: **The Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came to Damascus has sent me to you** is reborn as Paul—washed in the blood and cleansed utterly, as Paul the redeemed of the Lord. Ananias could not have imagined 1. the forces of heaven being loosed on earth through him, through the baptism of the Apostle Paul. [Baptismal candidates, are you aware that the forces of heaven are being loosed this day through you? The power of God unto salvation has been vested in you. You are part of God's plan to eradicate evil.]

2. The ramifications of this for the Gentile mission and church growth. [Candidates: your testimony is the seed of the church. Sow broadly.]

Or 3. the set back that this entailed for the Evil One who lost a very effective persecutor of the church even as God gained an even more effective proselytizer of Christian faith. [Candidates: you are set this day among the company of the saints which no one can number, or even estimate. You are a movement. You are the Kingdom of God. You are Christ's mission to the sick, the troubled, the distressed or the oppressed—Christ has chosen to work through you. Be faithful and be diligent.]

Untold millions have benefitted from the rather prosaic, but studied obedience of Ananias, a named disciple of Jesus who prayed for Paul's sight and spiritual rebirth. It was not an insignificant thing that Ananias did, nothing in kingdom work is insignificant. Endow your days with godly purpose and loving resolve.

Similarly, this day, when we baptize Matthias and Karen, a grandson and a grandmother, we pray that heaven will be loosed on earth through them, that the light of the gospel might shine through them, that the Spirit *within them* might do great things through them, including but not limited to the salvation of souls, eradication of evil, both within and amongst us. Let us arise and put our hands to the work.

We are so ready. Why just last week we reviewed the gospel according to Peter, we were urged to memorize Acts 10:34-43:

34 Opening his mouth, Peter said: "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, 35 but in every nation the one who [a]¹fears Him and [b]does what is right is

¹Footnotes

- a. Acts 10:35 Or *reveres*
- b. Acts 10:35 Lit *works righteousness*
- c. Acts 10:36 Or *the gospel of peace*
- d. Acts 10:38 Or *How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth*
- e. Acts 10:38 Lit *who went*
- f. Acts 10:39 Or *countryside*

acceptable to Him. **36** The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching ^[g]peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)— **37** you yourselves know the thing that happened throughout Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. **38** ^[d]*You know of* Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, ^[e]and *how* He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. **39** We are witnesses of all the things that He did both in the ^[f]country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on ^[g]a cross. **40** God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He ^[h]be revealed, **41** not to all the people, but to witnesses who had been chosen beforehand by God, *that is*, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. **42** And He ordered us to ^[i]preach to the people, and to testify solemnly that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. **43** All the prophets testify of Him, that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.”

There is no partiality before God is an important word for today—no race, gender, age or culture bar to for anyone **who fears God and does what is right**—all such are **acceptable** to him. Then Peter moves on to speak of Jesus: **the word which he sent to the sons of Israel**. (v. 36) **Preaching peace through Jesus Christ** (He is our peace because **He is Lord of all**). Then Peter talks about the **thing that happened throughout Judea**. . . starting with **the baptism of John** (for repentance of sin—we must never forget that the mission of Jesus was about forgiveness of sin as part of the eradication of evil). Only God can eradicate evil and he has begun to do so through the sending of his Son (atonement). And by following up with the gift of the Holy Spirit we are strengthened to do it.

Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and so **he went about doing good (demonstrating the justice, mercy and faithfulness of God** (Matt. 23:23))—or as I put it recently, the kindness, benevolence and goodness of God. **He was healing all who were oppressed by the devil.**

We are all witnesses of what he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem—Peter alludes to the events of passion week, the trial, conviction and execution of Jesus (!) Yes, we are, but we are but poor witnesses if we never witness to what we know, have heard and received. We witness to all that Jesus did in the world as well as witness to all he has done in us.

They crucified him he was buried and on the third day rose from the dead. As prophesied (v. 43), and as now fulfilled. And we are witnesses to the fact that

g. Acts 10:39 Lit *wood*; see Deut 21:23
 h. Acts 10:40 Lit *become visible*
 i. Acts 10:42 Or *proclaim*

Jesus appeared, **was revealed to those chosen beforehand, who ate and drank with Him after the resurrection!** (v.41) We testify to their witness as those who were truly there at the time, with him and each other.

And He ordered us to ¶preach to the people, and to testify solemnly that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead.

We are to preach Jesus to everyone. And we are to preach him both as Lord and Savior, and as **Judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify of Him, that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.**” In other words, the history of his ministry and the significance of his life, both to be alive in us and we are to pass it on.

Acts 10:34-43 is the framework upon which we hang the good news of Jesus—it represents the outline of what we know, and of what we need to share to the glory of God.

Amen.