Midweek 2 Lent

Persecution of Jesus Acts 9

March 11, 2020

Series A

Persecution of Jesus

Tonight, we pick up in Acts Chapter Nine. Sometime after Stephen’s speech to the council of Jerusalem and his stoning to death. Saul was present for the stoning of Stephen. Saul continues his rampage against the Lord’s disciples.

Listen to these words as recorded by Dr. Luke, “But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest **2**and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. **3**Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. **4**And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” **5**And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. **6**But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” **7**The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. **8**Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. **9**And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. **10**Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord.” **11**And the Lord said to him, “Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, **12**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.” **13**But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. **14**And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.” **15**But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. **16**For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” **17**So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” **18**And immediately, something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; **19**and taking food, he was strengthened.”

The challenges before us tonight are at least two. The first is this, “When have you made fun or persecuted someone for their beliefs in God? Or when have you failed to stand up for someone who was being made fun of and joined the crowd mocking the person who was standing up for God? Maybe you made fun of someone who was standing up for what’s right? Perhaps instead, you stood silently buy when others mocked that person without coming to their defense. This includes the causes of Abortion, Euthanasia of our Elderly, or children born with physical deformities and cognitive limitations.

The second challenge before us tonight is when have you or I refused to “Go and Do, or at least hesitated and argued with God about something He has told you to go and do?” Or maybe you prevented someone else from going and doing or made it more difficult for them to “Go and Do” as they were called to go and do by God. Ananias raises some very valid concerns from a human perspective. However, it’s not his or our place to question God and debate him about a command or imperative that He gives to you as one of His children. It’s different from asking him for clarification of what He is asking you or me to do.

In our story, tonight, Ananias, was hesitant to do as God told him to do. He questioned God by speaking to him of Saul’s harsh reputation. Ananias tells God how much Saul who is now called Paul, has done to harm Jesus' disciples. God is firm in his instructions to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.” In other words, God does not give us any wiggle room for excuses. He does not allow us to object-based upon our limited understanding. God is God and we are not! Therefore, we are to go and do as He has commanded us to do.

Reflect for a few moments and consider your sins of arguing, particularly with God, defending the faith, disobedience, mocking, persecution, refusing to go and do, silence, standing up for what’s right. Perhaps even with me as the pastor or messenger, God has placed here to challenge you to take an honest look at yourself and your life. We now pause for a few moments of silent reflection and individual silent confession. ***(Go to the rail and kneel).*** We now corporately confess our sins together to conclude our sermon. Amen.