

07.14.24 ~ Pentecost 8
“The Beauty of Teaching & Preaching”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Luke 9:1-6 (GNT)

Jesus Sends Out the Twelve Disciples

¹ Jesus called the twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases. ² Then he sent them out to preach the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick, ³ after saying to them, “Take nothing with you for the trip: no walking stick, no beggar's bag, no food, no money, not even an extra shirt. ⁴ Wherever you are welcomed, stay in the same house until you leave that town; ⁵ wherever people don't welcome you, leave that town and shake the dust off your feet as a warning to them.”

⁶ The disciples left and traveled through all the villages, preaching the Good News and healing people everywhere.

Leader: These Are Instructions from Jesus.

All: Thanks be to God!

Acts 9:26-40 (NLT)

²⁶ When Saul arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to meet with the believers, but they were all afraid of him. They did not believe he had truly become a believer! ²⁷ Then Barnabas brought him to the apostles and told them how Saul had seen the Lord on the way to Damascus and how the Lord had spoken to Saul. He also told them that Saul had preached boldly in the name of Jesus in Damascus.

²⁸ So Saul stayed with the apostles and went all around Jerusalem with them, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. ²⁹ He debated with some Greek-speaking Jews, but they tried to murder him. ³⁰ When the believers heard about this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus, his hometown.

³¹ The church then had peace throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, and it became stronger as the believers lived in the fear of the Lord. And with the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, it also grew in numbers.

Peter Heals Aeneas and Raises Dorcas

³² Meanwhile, Peter traveled from place to place, and he came down to visit the believers in the town of Lydda. ³³ There he met a man named Aeneas, who had been paralyzed and bedridden for eight years. ³⁴ Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you! Get up, and roll up your sleeping mat!” And he was healed instantly.

³⁵ Then the whole population of Lydda and Sharon saw Aeneas walking around, and they turned to the Lord.

³⁶ There was a believer in Joppa named Tabitha (which in Greek is Dorcas). She was always doing kind things for others and helping the poor. ³⁷ About this time she became ill and died. Her body was washed for burial and laid in an upstairs room.

³⁸ But the believers had heard that Peter was nearby at Lydda, so they sent two men to beg him, “Please come as soon as possible!”

³⁹ So Peter returned with them; and as soon as he arrived, they took him to the upstairs room. The room was filled with widows who were weeping and showing him the coats and other clothes Dorcas had made for them. ⁴⁰ But Peter asked them

all to leave the room; then he knelt and prayed. Turning to the body he said, “Get up, Tabitha.” And she opened her eyes! When she saw Peter, she sat up!

Leader: This is Luke’s Account of the Early Church.

All: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Loving God, we thank you for another week of work, play, rest, healing, joy, grief, celebration, milestone birthdays, fellowship, study, worship, housing, transportation, and sustenance. We also thank you for the legacy and integrity of Christianity as a whole. Help us to interpret beauty in the preaching and teaching we do and experience. Lord, help us to see the beauty you create in ordinary people and activities. We thank you for all that is happening in and beyond the church because of our meager efforts. Strengthen us, Lord, to be courageous in light of a divisive nation and the violence we witness in our world and our country. Bring us peace so that we can see beauty in even hard things. May we remember our commission to spread the Gospel to those who do not know your Son, Jesus. Finally, open these Scriptures to enlighten us and motivate us to be your healing light in the world. May my reflections be your voice heard today. Amen.

Well, in light of the assassination attempt on Former President Donald Trump’s life yesterday and the attendee’s loss of life and injuries, we clearly, as a nation, need more preaching and teaching of civility, diplomacy, ethics, peaceful resolution to conflict, understanding the difference between right and wrong, integrity, and respect. The sermon topic may diverge a bit from the original title, but we are at the right place and time today, to pray for our country, our politicians, and our citizens. Today we need the power of Jesus’ and Peter’s healing interventions as heard in our Scripture readings.

It is so sad to mar a beautiful weekend of art, music, serving the community of Annandale with our food mission contributions, and celebrating Ruby’s 102nd birthday! We will not let the violence from yesterday break our spirits of joy, hope, and agape love! Agreed? God’s will and protection will prevail. As current President Joe Biden responded, “there is no place in America for this kind of violence. It's

sick, it's sick. It's one of the reasons why we have to unite this country . . . We cannot be like this. We cannot condone this.” Any political violence or for that matter, any violence is inappropriate.

We know from our own Bible studies over the years that rulers and individuals in Biblical times resorted to violence to overthrow rulers and defeat enemies. But Jesus’ short ministry and message from God the Father was one of peace, love, education, and reconciliation. True, Jesus turned things upside down during his time, and perhaps that is what we are called to do as well; be instruments of God’s peace and reconciliation in this world of conflict and division. How to do it is not easy because we are human beings with emotions, preferences, and even sin. Christ’s time of the cross defeated sin for those who believe in him, but it still surrounds us. You have a choice to let that sin darken your days and nights OR to let Christ brighten our purpose and mission and guide our steps toward living in repentance, forgiveness, and expectation of his return.

Christ’s disciples were living in similar violent times. Luke’s passage reveals what Jesus told his disciples to do—to preach the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick. Jesus had been anointed by the Spirit at his baptism and that power would strengthen him during his temptation in the desert, throughout his ministry (3:21-22; 4:1-2, 18), and during the ordeal on the cross. Jesus conveyed and promised the gift of the Spirit to all who asked for it, particularly those who were bullied or persecuted. Jesus had called his disciples, lived with them by example, and taught them human responsibility and divine intervention. They had witnessed miracles and healings, and in the Luke passage, Jesus sends

them out two at a time to carry on his work. He had given them power over disease and demons; but they must go as they were, trusting the power of God to go before them. They could not “prepare” by packing a bag or two, like we overpack for vacation.

Yesterday at the food pantry, one young couple was pregnant, and I got the sudden urge to pray for them as they left with a cart of healthy, sustainable food items. That did not come from my brain or any intention of my own. I simply acted upon the Holy Spirit’s leading; I had uttered a wish to a volunteer that we had more things for pregnant parents, when I realized we did have what they needed—Jesus! So, we prayed for them and their baby’s future. I share this story to help you see the beauty of serving and ministering to those who feel scared, lost, inadequate, or anxious about their future. That is the beauty of prayer; it is a teaching tool where Christ can be brought back to our minds with all his goodness, kindness, and power. One does not have to be an ordained minister to pray for someone! As believers, we too have received the **derived or delegated authority** from Jesus and must act on it in faith.

Look at Saul/Paul! In the second passage, many did not believe his conversion because he had been the most despised killer of Christ followers. Yet, in Acts 9, Barnabas defended Paul, and they preached the Gospel all around Damascus and then Caesarea until Paul was threatened. He left that area to continue Christ’s work elsewhere, and we know from his missionary journeys how successful Paul was in planting churches throughout what is now Turkey and Asia.

Peter was not always the most popular disciple, either, yet we see from his healing of Aneas and Dorcas, that he was loyal and trusting in

the spirit Christ had conveyed upon them. At the risk of arrest and persecution, Peter continued Jesus' work after the Resurrection. Ananias is the first healing we read about in Acts 9; he suffered eight years of disability and despair that were gone in an instant of prayer! How beautiful for this suffering man; many people witnessed his physical and spiritual healing and learned of God's power.

Peter was called to Dorcas' deathbed by her friends. You see, she was a good woman of God, who cared for the poor, clothed, and fed them, yet she had been dead a few days. Peter came anyway because of the testimony of those friends and all who knew her skilled and compassionate work in Lydda. They had brought their garments to show her artistry and attest to her benevolent soul. Again, through the delegated authority of the Spirit of Christ, she was raised from the dead—"Tabitha, come"—and the people were taught and encouraged as they surrendered their lives to Christ. These miracles of healing continued long after the Resurrection and continue today. Christ heals through prayer, preaching, and teaching even today through individuals and disciples like Peter, you, and me.

Beauty is all around us if we slow down and perceive it. If we as Christ followers can only see evil in our world, then why are we in church at all? We come to refuel ourselves through fellowship, Scripture, preaching, and teaching, and yes, to appreciate the beauty in all we see and experience. Invite someone to join you in your pursuit of beauty. God will reveal beauty and hope to you, even in the violence of this world, or in a coffee shop art exhibit, or in a pregnant couple's joy, or in the light streaming through our stained-glass windows, or in the profuse, delicate

flowers on a hydrangea bush! We must ask for that insight, however. Please ask God to show you more beauty in the everyday matters and relationships of your life; you will be richer for it and more at peace in the world, I am certain. Amen. ||

Let us pray. Dear Lord, we thank you today for these words of healing and miracles. As we face a week of uncertainty and a month of more birthday celebrations, let us appreciate one another and the beauty of this world. Protect and heal us from the violence surrounding us as we continue to do your work in the world with all good intentions. We ask your Spirit to strengthen us and embolden us every day to be your disciples and to see the beauty in that role until your return. Thank you, Jesus, for it is in your name we pray, **Amen.**