

Bubba was quite a religious man, and everybody loved Bubba.

He lived in a little apartment, on the ground floor, but he was getting on in years. Every night he prayed to God, “Dear Lord, it’s old Bubba; I’m ready, Lord, here I am, ready to come home.”

Every night he prayed that prayer, and since Bubba was a little hard of hearing, he figured God might be, too; so he did pray a little on the loud side. Bubba’s bedroom was on the front side of the apartment, so anybody walking by could hear him.

One night, some of his friends thought they’d have a little fun with Bubba. They waited outside his window, and when they heard him start to pray, they walked to the door and knocked.

It was late, and when Bubba got to the door, he asked, “Who is it?” And they answered, “This is the Lord’s angel, come for old Bubba!”

There was a silence, and then from inside, “Old Bubba don’t live here no more!”

It’s a funny story, but there’s a truth to it that’s not so funny.

When God does call, many are more like Bubba than Ananias in our story this morning.

Ananias was also a very religious man, a Jew who was a leader in the growing Christian community in Damascus.

The story says that the Lord spoke to him in a vision, called him by name, “Ananias. Go to the street named Straight, to the house of Judas, and find the man Saul of Tarsus.”

Saul, Saul of Tarsus.

I imagine that name sent a chill through Ananias.

Because Ananias probably knew that his own name was on the top of Saul’s list.

You see, Saul was coming to Damascus to arrest those Jews, like Ananias, who belonged to the group that followed Jesus of Nazareth.

Was there silence on the other side of the door? Did Ananias still live there?

Ananias answers, “Here I am.”

Ananias, this is the only time we ever hear of him, but his answer to God’s call, “Here I am, Lord,” has quite a history in the Bible.

It was Moses’ answer when God called him at the burning bush.

God calls Abraham: Here I am.

God calls Jacob: Here I am.

God calls Samuel: Here I am.

God calls Isaiah: Here I am.

God calls Mary: Here I am.

They were all living the words of the psalmist: “Here I am...I delight to do your will, O my God...”

Ananias had every good reason not to go, but Ananias went, his answer to God, like all the other heroes of the faith: “Here I am”.

Arthur Ashe, the great tennis player, an extraordinary human being, said in a speech, “True heroism is remarkably sober, very undramatic. It is not the urge to surpass all others at whatever cost, but the urge to serve others at whatever cost.”

To put it in Presbyterian terms, as we say in our Book of Order, “The Church is to be a community of faith, entrusting itself to God alone, even at the risk of losing its life.”

God calls to Ananias in a vision to go to the street called Straight and find a man named Saul, even at the risk of losing his own life.

Now let me be clear here. A vision is not some prediction of the future that is inescapable, not some fatalistic what-will-be-will-be kind of talk.

A vision from God is when we see our lives clearly: who we are and how things are and what could be different and what we might need to do about it.

Bubba or Ananias?

Brennan Manning says in his wonderful book, *The Ragamuffin Gospel*:

“Most of us spend considerable time putting off the things we should be doing, or we would like to do, or we want to do but are afraid to do.

We are afraid of failure...Each of us pays a heavy price for our fear of falling flat on our face. It assures the progressive narrowing of our personalities...As we get older we only do the things we do well.

There is no growth in Jesus Christ without some difficulty and fumbling. If we are to keep on growing, we must keep on risking failure throughout our lives.”

Faith is a risking business. That’s the essence of the call that came to Ananias.

Think about it. The first person Saul saw when his sight was restored was Ananias. The scales came off and his first vision where he saw clearly.

Could he ever forget Ananias?

Saul the Assassin became Paul the Ambassador and the gospel has journeyed across the centuries from the room in that house on the street named Straight to this room on the street named Hancock.

Because of Ananias, people are gathered around tables like this in rooms on streets around the world

God calls us to the same faith-risking business as we go to our street named Straight, but are we afraid to entrust our lives to God?

Something bad may happen when we find Saul.

God calls you and me to find the Saul in our world with a hope-filled heart, but we often hesitate, afraid someone may take advantage of us.

God calls us to love the enemy Saul we find out there and even to love the Saul we find within us and maybe that’s what we are most afraid of.

We have been hurt and we have hurt others. We have been betrayed and we have betrayed others.

God sees inside of us and how terribly confused we are by a world that makes so little sense at times.

God knows how easily frightened we are by events over which we have no control.

Like Jill Duffield, Editor of the *Presbyterian Outlook* says in her prayer this week, “We come to you, Lord of all, exhausted by the current state of our life together, uncertain how to make it better, utterly dependent on your grace to show us the way. Grant us the vision of your promised future and give us the courage to take hold of it, no matter what we must do to be the witnesses to Jesus Christ we are, bearers of light and life and peace. We trust the One who has called us to do this.”

God calls to the Ananias in us to go to the Sauls among us.

We know those streets where there are those overwhelmed by disaster, some made miserable by false hopes, some deceived by false prophets, some find their lives empty of love, empty of meaning.

We know those streets where some are hungry,
homeless, oppressed, exploited, abused; those
streets in which people kill and destroy each
other and helpless, innocent bystanders, too.
As you receive the bread and cup in a few
moments, think of God's call to you.

Then, as you receive the bread and cup, will
there be silence on your side of the door or will
you answer: Here I am, Lord.

So that God may speak through you to the world,
so that the Lord may act through you for the
poor, the hungry, the imprisoned and lonely,
the sad and sorrowful,
those who have no family table,
who have been rejected, lost,
left to fend for themselves,
on whatever street it may be.

Here I am, Lord.

To give the life and love of Christ
to all the people I meet
until all people and all nations
know the length and breadth and height and
depth of God's undying love in Jesus Christ.

Here I am.

To receive the peace and communion
for the whole human race.

Here I am.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.