

## The Good News is all are called to be instruments of the Holy Spirit.

In the Name of the Father and of the +Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Ananias of Damascus. He's just a bit player in the context of the entire Bible, so why should we even care to know about him? What's the big deal about some guy getting a vision from God? After all, he's no John the Baptist or Isaiah or Jeremiah after all. All Ananias did was go to Saul and lay his hands on him. So what?

Well, Ananias did what the Lord asked of him in a vision, that's one reason. Ananias was told to go see Saul, persecutor of the followers of Jesus Christ, and lay hands on him. Saul, the Lord assured Ananias, was expecting him. Ananias went as he was told, met Saul, laid hands on him, and Saul regained his sight. Was Ananias scared? Probably, at least a little. But what training did Ananias have before he went to Saul? He wasn't a leader of the Christian community in Damascus, or Luke, the stickler for details, would have noted that fact. Ananias was no different than any other layperson. He was just fulfilling his calling.

We can learn a lot from Ananias. You see, not everyone can be like Saul. Saul was a special man, to be sure. He was called by the Lord to fulfill a special purpose in God's plan of salvation for mankind—to carry the Gospel message to the Gentiles. However, Saul had to come to know that message, and gain an understanding of who Jesus Christ was and why he came to live, teach, die and rise from the dead. For Saul, God knew it would take something dramatic to get the point across. That is why he experienced the vision on the road to Damascus, the loss of his sight, the vision foretelling the coming of Ananias, the actual visit, and the laying on of hands. Ananias was an instrument of God, living out his baptismal call as a child of God.

When we are baptized and hands are laid upon us asking God to send the Holy Spirit to us, we are received into God's family as his children and welcomed as sisters and brothers of Christ. As with most families, there are responsibilities we accept as part of a family. We care for one another. We offer words of comfort, counsel, and even admonition to one another. That's how families are called to act toward one another. In God's family, we have some other responsibilities that come with our baptismal covenant.

One of those responsibilities is to join together regularly with fellow sisters and brothers to hear the Word of God proclaimed to us, to offer our prayers, tithes, and offerings to God in thanksgiving for all God has done for us, and to receive the sacrament of Holy Communion as a sign of God's love and grace for us. When we gather together in worship, we are not only fed

individually, but we feed, strengthen, and support one another as well. In corporate worship, we see the work of God not in our private lives, but in the lives of others. That's why it is important for us to gather together regularly for worship and praise of our Lord.

Another responsibility we have as children of God is to share the Good News that comes to us in the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the world. This is not a responsibility reserved for those who are ordained, called, or set apart to be preachers, pastors, or priests of the church. Rather, it is a responsibility that comes to every one of the baptized, as we are reminded in the Great Commission to go and make disciples—students and followers—of all nations. Note that in Christ's call to us to make disciples we are not called—or expected—to make believers. Believers—those who have faith in Christ Jesus—are made believers by the power of the Holy Spirit, not by any works or deeds of human beings. We are called to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, because those who believe and are baptized shall be saved. *This is what Ananias was called by the Lord Jesus Christ to do!*

Every baptized child of God, regardless of age, experience, training, vocation, or location, is called to be an instrument of God's work in the world. You don't need to be ordained as a pastor to be involved in the spread of the Gospel. God promises that the words you need to know will be placed in your mouth by the power of the Holy Spirit. You don't need to have the gift of gab, a silver tongue, a fancy degree, or a lifetime of experience. Most importantly, you don't have to worry that God is relying on *you* to make someone *believe*. All you are called to do is to make disciples—students, learners. God will see to the rest.

So then, if all of the pressure is off, then what is there to concern any of us as we go into the world to share the Good News with friends, family, and strangers. Will family and friends shun you when you talk about your faith? Not likely. If you are talking with a stranger about faith, church, God, or some other topic, and the stranger isn't interested in hearing what you have to share, should it bother you? Not at all. You don't have to worry about saving the soul of a single person, let alone the world. *That has already been done!* All you are asked to do is help share the Good News and encourage others to become disciples.

Right now, every member of this congregation has an excellent opportunity to talk about the Gospel and how we at Abiding Presence are living it in our every day lives. We have opened our doors to the Paint Branch Montessori School. The school suffered a devastating fire, and we opened our doors to a group of fellow sisters and brothers of God's own creation when they were in need. Share that good news with others. When folks ask about the school, you can tell them they are using our building. It's a part of our ministry and work to meet needs in our community as best we can as we are called by God to do. If someone expresses concern about

the school, invite them to come and see for themselves. The doors are always open. If someone expresses appreciation about our hospitality, invite them to come and see for themselves the work we are doing here. Perhaps that stranger or friend might be interested in learning more about our work and witness.

People cannot become disciples if they aren't given the opportunity to learn. Let's be honest with each other—our physical location doesn't lead to a huge number of walk-in visitors during the week or on Sunday morning. We have to go out of our way, take a little personal risk, and exercise our baptismal call that God has given to us. In short, we are called to be like Ananias.

Ananias was called by the Lord Jesus in a vision to go to a particular person for a particular reason. For most of us, we have a more generalized call. But our call is just as important nonetheless. That might be as scary to the person called as it was for Ananias to go to see Saul. But fulfilling the call would be no more of a challenge than the call to see Saul, because the Holy Spirit is with us.

Be an instrument of God. Share the Good News with someone this week. Share it more than once. Make disciples, and let the Holy Spirit do what the Holy Spirit does best.