

“Serve Joyfully”

Sermon by Robb McCoy

The United Methodist Church Council of Bishops has created a new Guiding Vision for the UMC. For the next three weeks we will examine the three main parts of this statement: love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously. Philip, Ananias, and Peter exemplified these ideas in the book of Acts.



The United Methodist Church forms disciples of Jesus Christ who, empowered by the Holy Spirit, love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously in local communities and worldwide connections.

Choosing Ananias to talk about joyful service might be a stretch. As someone in our Bible study said, “he doesn’t seem very joyful about this.”

“I guess you’re right,” I said. “But ‘serve reluctantly and with fear and trepidation’ doesn’t roll off the tongue for a vision statement.”

Ananias’s service is an important but oft overlooked part of this story. It is after all, Paul’s origin story. Paul is the main character. Paul has already been named as the main antagonist against the early Christians. He was on the scene approving of Stephen’s murder, and now he is on his way to Damascus to arrest Christians there - including, presumably, Ananias.

When he is struck blind by Christ he is left completely vulnerable, and one who he was coming to persecute is given the unlikely task of nursing Paul back to health. Once again, the Holy Spirit is the catalyst in this (as was the case last week and is the case next week too). Ananias is called to help Paul, and his response is “Wait a second God, do you realize who that is?” (my rough translation).

Yet Ananias served. He did so reluctantly, but he did it with faith. He trusted God and helped remove the scales from Paul’s eyes. And Paul, who’s whole world was turned upside down by this remarkable encounter on the road to Damascus, was suddenly set right again. Ananias helped Paul re-orient his life, and he became the apostle to the Gentiles.

Ananias’ joy was not immediate, but as he watched Paul turn into a remarkable preacher, teacher, he must



must have felt something. As Paul planted churches across Asia Minor and around the Mediterranean, as his letters were read in gathering, and as his reputation grew, I hope that Ananias looked back on his “yes” with joy.

Sometimes our service doesn’t come with immediate joy. Sometimes service is inconvenient or even dangerous, but Christian joy is not about the immediate. It is about something deeper.

It is important to look at the story of Paul and see the people like Ananias who made his work possible. I want you to think about your own life and see the people who were Ananias to you. I can of teachers, pastors, classmates, and friends who helped guide me through difficult times.

When I was was lost or blind or when my world and faith had been turned upside down, there were people there who prayed with me. They studied with me. They challenged me. I am thankful for my Ananias, and I hope you are thankful for yours.

Today however, we are called to be Ananias for someone else. Christian service is not always joyful in the moment, but that doesn’t mean it isn’t worth it. Paul needed re-orientation, and Ananias’s service did that. Serving joyfully and reluctantly are not mutually exclusive. Christian service re-orientes the one being served and the one doing the serving. In service, we are re-oriented on God’s path of love, generosity, and fellowship.

The served sees what love can look like and realizes they are worthy of it. The server receives joy that transcends instant gratification.