

Raise your hand if you've ever done the wrong thing for the right reason— meaning your intentions were great, but you messed it up anyway.

Raise your hand if you've ever been afraid to talk to someone about something they've done wrong.

Raise your hand if you've ever been the person someone else was afraid to talk to.

Raise your hand if you've ever had a change of heart. Where your opinion on a particular topic shifted from one position to the other.

If any of those things have ever happened to you, then I think you would have a good understanding of the type of situation we find in today's second reading.

You see, while we Christians reading this story now would see Saul as the villain. Saul did not see himself that way at all. Saul thought he was doing the right thing in taking the Christians prisoner. He knew he was right. He was God's champion! Later, after his conversion, Paul called himself the Pharisee of Pharisees. He was the most righteous. He had learned from the best teachers and he knew God and what God demanded of his people, and these Christians, these followers of the Way, were all wrong, and he was going to show them just how wrong they were.

Have you ever felt like that? Raise your hand if you have ever been so sure that you were on the right side of history that no one could convince you otherwise?

I have too.

Sometimes it takes an act of God to make us change our minds.

Suddenly, a light from heaven flashed around Saul. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?*"

Can you imagine what that must have felt like? To be going down the road, headed toward what you think is the right decision, confident in your position, and then to hear that voice? To hear the pain of the person or the people you were convinced were the enemy cry out and say, "*why are you persecuting me!?*"

I think, or at least I hope, that something changes when a person is confronted face to face with the pain that they've caused someone else. I know it doesn't always work out that way. Look back to Exodus where Pharaoh's heart is hardened toward the suffering Hebrews. But, sometimes, and maybe more often than not, when we are confronted face to face by the people we have hurt, transformation and reconciliation can occur because we recognize in the other person the same image of God in which we ourselves were created.

As hard as it is to be confronted by our own mistakes, I think it's actually harder to be the one who confronts. This is the position in which Ananias finds himself in Acts 9.

Ananias, we learn, was a leader of the Christian community in Damascus. He would have been at the top of Saul's list of people to round up and imprison. And he knew it. When the Lord tells Ananias to go and speak to Saul, Ananias is afraid. He knew what Saul had done to Jesus' followers in Jerusalem and he knew that Saul had the power to do that here.

Ananias responds to God's command to speak to Saul in a way similar to many of the prophets of the Old Testament. He begins with "Here I am" or "Yes, Lord." Acknowledging that his ultimate call is to serve and to obey. But

this service doesn't come without questions. Ananias is worried about the possible consequences of his meeting with Saul.

The Lord responds to Ananias' questions by telling him that Saul is a chosen instrument by which the world would come to know Jesus' name.

So, Ananias goes to the house where Saul was staying and greets Saul by calling him "Brother." Ananias doesn't say, "Hey there, jerk" he doesn't call him a sinner or a killer. Ananias calls Saul "Brother". Here, Ananias acknowledges and honors the image of God in which the both of them were created. This allows space for transformation to occur as scales fall from Saul's eyes. Reconciliation follows when Saul is baptized and stays with the disciples in Damascus. His enemies have become his hosts. Saul is transformed from captor to houseguest. And here we come to an important point. *It doesn't matter what you've done in the past. God loves you and can use your help in making a better future.*

Repeat.

Saul's story reminds me that even if I am certain that I'm right about this or that, God can send a messenger at any time to change my heart. Ananias reminds me that all who are called to be instruments of God are to be called "Brother, Sister, Sibling" and to be welcomed into the community no matter their past.

I pray that you meet God on the road today. I pray that if hearts need to change that God will do it, and clear the scales from blinded eyes. I pray that if you are called like Ananias to reach out to someone who needs to hear the truth, that you would be brave and courageous and compassionate—that fear would be replaced with trust in God. Thanks be to God. Amen.