

No one is born a Christian. Some may be born into a Christian home, but our belief is that people become Christian. Sometimes that happens young when an infant is brought to church and baptized. Sometimes, like Paul in this story, it was when he met Jesus along the way or when Ananias laid hands on him and he was baptized as an adult. In that setting in the midst of God's beautiful creation people are touched by God's grace. As a child and youth I was blessed to go to a camp in Western PA supported by my home church. As I grew older I participated at work days and even a work week at camp. Like a number of my colleagues in ministry, our calls into ministry either came at summer camp or was affirmed at summer camp as a child or youth. Knowing the profound experience of Christian camping, I have participated on the boards of camps, been a counsellor, worked on work projects and sent my own daughters to camp where later they each became camp counselors. One of these summers I look forward to being able to help send grandchildren to camp!

In this story there is a personal experience of the apostle Paul encountering Jesus, but just as importantly there is the experience of Paul encountering a Christian community that though at first fearful and apprehensive, reaches out and embraces Paul. Touching him with the touch of their prayer and faith. He comes to see and believe even becoming baptized and preaches the Good News! Have you seen lives so changed? They seem to completely turn their lives around!

Now, usually we see this as the story of Paul's miraculous conversion from pious persecutor to prolific preacher. There he is on the Damascus Road, the flashing of a bright light from heaven, the voice. (Some of us have had similar experiences as well, although perhaps not as dramatic.) David Leininger shared a story that shed a new light on this story by focusing on Ananias, the one who had his own vision and had a "touching story" of his own.

He wrote, "The drama in this one is heightened though for me once Saul as a blind man is brought into the city. Following a three-day pause in darkness (is there something significant about three days — echoes of the resurrection!), we hear the story of one of the most courageous house calls in the history of Christianity: an otherwise-unknown disciple named Ananias, prompted by a celestial vision of his own, throws caution to the wind and comes to meet this fearsome antagonist. Ananias introduces himself, places his hands on blind Saul and says, "*Brother Saul, the Lord sent me—Jesus, who appeared to you on the way as you were coming here. He sent me so that you could see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.*" (Acts 9:17). And the world has never been the same since. All because one almost-anonymous disciple was willing to put life and limb on the line and do the Lord's bidding."

If you think about it, this was risky business, to say the least. Ananias knew Saul's reputation. Every Christian in Damascus did. But then comes this vision. We are not talking about some ecstatic experience here — the fact that Ananias questions the Lord in the midst of his asking, in effect, "What? Are you crazy?" suggests he is none too sure

about the prudence of what he is being asked to do. But Ananias puts aside his security concerns not only for himself but the whole Christian community and ventures out to visit that house on Straight Street.”

Perhaps it was because I was a boy, or just that I am a “Hands On” kind of guy. But from early memories I can recall hearing the words “Don’t touch that!” Did you hear that, too? I think it can stick with us for life and prevent us from all kinds of good work or ministry, because we, like Ananias, fear the consequences. In a world of “Be Careful!” how might we “Be Risky?!” Not Risqué!!! But be risky – take risks. Dare to reach out and touch someone. Yes, even someone untouchable! Remember it was the Good Samaritan who reached out and touched and healed the stranger by the side of the road.

When you pray, dare to hear what risks that God might ask you to take? Who and what is waiting in the house on Straight Street? Who knows? God knows! And God is trying to tell us! Today remember, the risk that an almost anonymous disciple named Ananias took, changed the whole wide world. Remember those whose lives and stories have touched you and forever changed your world. Give glory to God for sending them to help you! And find ways to answer God’s call on your life today. Is there a co-worker, a neighbor, a stranger in need this week? Take a chance. Be Risky! Alleluia and Amen.

Sometimes It Doesn’t Take Too Much

Jeffrey B. Childs 5/3/22

Sometimes it doesn't take too much,
To touch another's heart.
We can offer a loving touch,
To let the healing start.

It happened to Saul that way one day,
When Ananias came.
Upon Saul’s head his hands did lay,
Saul’d never be the same.

Ananias didn't want to go,
He'd rather stay away,
Through his obedience God would show,
A miracle that day.

What might happen to us today,
If we hear God in prayer.
We'll do God's will in some small way,
Sharing God's love and care.