

# Christ Church New Southgate & Friern Barnet

## 8 May 2022

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*Welcome*

*Song: All creatures of our God and king*

God, our Creator and our guide,  
you call us to be your witnesses and you are  
with us as we go.

As we gather together today,  
shine your light into our hearts  
so that we may see how we can be your  
witnesses  
in the lives that we live every day.

**Amen.**

*Song: Let all creation*

*Song: The splendor of a King, clothed in majesty*

*Active Story*

Paul was walking along the road to  
Damascus.

*(use your hands to make a walking action)*

He saw a bright light.

*(put your hands over your eyes)*

He fell to the ground.

*(bang the ground with your hand)*

Paul heard Jesus speaking to him,

*(cup your ears)*

but he was blind, and could not see.

*(cover your eyes with your hands)*

Paul walked on to Damascus.

*(‘walking’ action)*

Ananias went to meet Paul.

*(‘walking’ action)*

Ananias prayed.

*(put your hands together in prayer)*

Now Paul could see again.

*(cover your eyes and then fling your hands away)*

But his first challenge was to convince the Christians that his life had changed. What on earth do you make of someone who was coming to arrest you, possibly to oversee your death (as he had done Stephen’s), who then says he wants to be your friend and fellow-worker. How do we each deal with someone who seems to become so radically different? We never know what is in store in our own life or anyone else’s life: we must always be prepared to be surprised – and to work with the surprising.

*Reading: Acts 9.10-19 by Roger Oram*

<sup>10</sup> In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!”

“Yes, Lord,” he answered.

<sup>11</sup> The Lord told him, “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. <sup>12</sup> In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.”

<sup>13</sup> “Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.”

<sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. <sup>16</sup> I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

<sup>17</sup> Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” <sup>18</sup> Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again.

He got up and was baptized, <sup>19</sup> and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

*Discussion*

- Talk together about changes at school, family life, moving house.
- Talk about what the changes mean to us. How do we cope with change?

*Song: Nothing is too big*

*Sermon: Here I am Lord*

Here I am Lord said Ananias. Here I am Lord to listen to you in crazy vision, here I am lord to go to house I don't know. Here I am Lord to meet a man I know is persecuting the church. Here I am Lord to meet with a man who could throw me into prison or even have me killed. Here I am lord.

Who are you Lord said Saul. Who are you Lord who has stopped me in my tracks. Who are you Lord, who has taken my sight away. Who are you lord who has led me to a house I do not know. Who are you Lord, I cannot eat or drink.

Ananias was an ordinary disciple. We know nothing of his background, status or role in the early church.

Saul was a highly influential man with a militia alongside him, a well known man of the council intelligent and powerful.

Both men were in a strange place.  
Both men could not see what was going on.  
Both men were – I think – a little scared.

It is Jesus that brings these two unlikely men together. It is the voice and light of Christ that leads Saul to Straight Street, and the Lord in a vision leading Ananias.

And it is only the power of the Spirit that gives Ananias strength to call Saul brother. Brother Saul. Can you imagine calling an enemy brother? There is enormous healing in that one word isn't there? Brother – you are part of the family of God now. Brother – I trust God and so I trust you. Brother – you are no longer alone on that road of conversion. Brother – you are now part of the church, the family of God. Do you know that all of us are brothers and sisters in Christ? All of us have a place of honour in God's family.

This family isn't like normal families where the oldest gets the best room and the youngest is spoilt. This family is where a relative nobody – Ananias, prays for Saul and through his hands God heals him. Through Ananias' hands Saul is filled with the Holy Spirit. Through Ananias, Saul is commissioned to be a light for the gentiles, the Lord's chosen instrument to declare the goodness of God to the world. There really are only two key voices after Jesus – Peter, and Saul / Paul. And Paul is not an apostle like Peter is, Saul is not one of the original disciples.

But Saul is commissioned by the Spirit, through Ananias' hands. With his commission he writes most of the new testament, he spreads the gospel throughout the known world to him. All of this means, that nobody needs a special prayer from a high fluting bishop to be God's chosen instrument, to be useful to God. All of us can be useful to God. All of us can do amazing things for God. All of us can proclaim that Jesus is Lord in ordinary and extraordinary ways for his glory.

But how many of us will be willing to say : Here I am Lord? Saul conversion was dramatic, but Ananias' faith was all the more convincing. Where would Saul have ended up if Ananias' had said no? Ananias overcame his prejudice against Saul, overcame fear,

overcame his knowledge based on rumours of Saul and listened to the Lord.

Ananias offered a radical welcome to Saul. Here we see a hospitality that is special to Christianity. It is a hospitality that sees other and offers a place in family that has no limits to who is our brother or sister. It is however a family that is based on conversion. Ananias doesn't call Saul a brother before he had met with the Lord, before he had changed. Saul is welcomed into the family of God when he has been converted. This spirit of conversion lives on in the church. How easy would it for Ananias to stay safe at home? How far more sensible is it for us to keep our church filled with people we know and are just like us? The Lord calls all of us, to lay down our expectations and fears and be open to change. Hans Kung – a famous theologian said the church must preach transformation, metanoia.

We are not shut ourselves off from the world but live in the everyday world inspired by the radical obedience that is demanded by the love of God. The church must be reformed again and again, converted again and again each day, in order to fulfil its task.

Hans Kung, *The Church*

Here I am Lord said Ananias.  
Here we are Lord, said Christ Church. Let us be courageous and see what the Spirit may do.

*Prayer*

When I am certain,  
open my eyes.  
When I am too quick to condemn,  
open my eyes.  
When I rejoice in another's downfall,  
open my eyes.

Help me to see you  
in the poor, the lonely,  
the person struggling with illness or disability.

Help me to see you  
in those whose lives are chaotic,  
in the most horrible criminal.

Help me to see you  
in the past-it politician  
and the people who used to be somebody.

And then,  
when my eyes are open  
and I can see you,  
give me the insight  
to make good choices,  
to walk in your way.

**Amen.**

*Song: Brother sister let me serve you*

*Prayers for the world*

Sisters and brothers in Christ,  
God invites us to bring our doubts and fears,  
our joys and concerns, our petitions and praise,  
and offer them for the earth and all its creatures.

*Open prayer*

Receive these prayers, O God,  
and transform us through them,  
that we may have eyes to see and hearts to understand  
not only what you do on our behalf,  
but what you call us to do  
so that your realm will come to fruition in glory. Amen.

*Song: Be thou my vision*

*Blessing*