

July 20, 2014: 6th Sunday after Pentecost

“Identity and Relevance”

Part 7. Chosen Instrument to Carry His Name
Acts 9:1-16

One of important purposes for our sermon series is to find out the spiritual foundation for the act of transformation. Transformation is about a change – a good change and real change.

Today we are going to talk about real change. A change God wants us to take, not simple a change we would like to see.

Many people hate change. Do you know why many people hate change? The reason is simple. People do not want to lose power to control. That’s primary reason that people hate change.

This pattern of life has a long history from the Athenian period, beginning 5th century B.C. There was a group of thinkers in Greece, called “Sophists,” meaning “wise guys.” They traveled from city to city, charging admission to their lectures – lectures not on the nature of reality or truth, but on the **nature of power and persuasion**. Not just skepticism but cynicism became the rule of the day. The most famous of the Sophist was PROTAGORAS (ca. 490-422 B.C.).

His famous claim is “Homo Mensura” – man is the measure. **Man is the measure** of all things, of things that are, that they are, and of things that are not, that they are not.¹ This Greek philosophy made a huge impact on the Jewish authorities on the second temple period – a time for the

¹ Donald Palmer, *Looking at Philosophy: The Unbearable Heaviness of Philosophy Made Lighter*, 2nd Edition, (London, Toronto, Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1994), p. 40.

rabbinic Judaism was prospered and up to Jesus’ days. It was the Pharisees who built on their theology on top of this foreign thought process. The Pharisees appear to the Jewish community as the most powerful leadership.

We now see the very good example from Saul of Tarsus, the main character of the scripture this morning. The scripture lesson is about the conversion of the Apostle Paul.

* Paul – status in western philosophy

As we learn a bit from Acts chapter 9, Saul, according to Luke, he was still breathing out “murderous threats” against the Lord’s disciples. Saul was a scary guy.

Acts 7:59 - 8:2 ⁵⁹ While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰ Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep. ^{NIV} **Acts 8:1** And Saul was there, giving approval to his death. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.

Saul of Tarsus knew how to irritate people. He knew how to use all the power and persuasion to accomplish whatever he wanted. He knew how to destroy any organization or group of people if he wanted. He knew how to eradicate any movement that goes against what he believes as right!

To this man, Saul, Jesus appears. Things get changed. A real change takes place. The scripture lesson is all about the real change and how powerful it is.

[an experiment on changing behavior]

Acts 9:1-16 ^{NIV} **Acts 9:1** Meanwhile, **Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples.** He went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to **the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.** ³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, **suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.** ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" ⁵ "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. **"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.** ⁶ "Now get up and go into the city, and **you will be told what you must do.**" ⁷ The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. ⁸ Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. ⁹ **For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.**

¹⁰ In Damascus there was **a disciple named Ananias.** The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered. ¹¹ 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.** ¹² In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and **place his hands on him to restore his sight."**

¹³ "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

¹⁵ But the Lord said to Ananias, **"Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.** ¹⁶ I will show him how much **he must suffer for my name."**

From the lesson we see a dramatic change of Saul's life. What we learn about the change is from Jesus. Jesus, the Risen

Lord, appears to Saul on his way to Damascus to destroy New Way – a Christian movement of the gospel.

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

"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.

"Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

It is an interesting description concerning a baptism of the Spirit. For three days, Saul was dead and born again. He became new being – God's chosen instrument to carry His name to the gentiles.

This morning, I want you and me to learn about becoming true and faithful disciples of Jesus Christ from the story of Paul's conversion.

We are like Saul of the story. We have made an effort to become persons of power and persuasion, because power and persuasion make our life easy and successful according to the worldly fashion.

What the scripture claims this morning is that true powers comes from God. God would like us to take advantage for His Kingdom, not for ours.

From the moment of conversation, Saul became the most powerful leader in the western world. He is renamed as Paul. Churches around the world throughout the ages are built

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and strengthened by Paul. Without his conversion, there should be no prosperity of the church today.

Then, how can we have such a powerful energy? Of course we can get it from the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Here are a couple of lessons we can learn this morning.

1. *Is Jesus your Lord?*

This is a powerful question. I want you to pay little more attention to Saul who encountered Jesus on his way to Damascus.

“Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked.

“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied. “Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

Lord = Jesus!

This new equation brought a dramatic change. Saul knew about what the Lordship is all about. Lordship is an absolute source of power, from which the spiritual foundation comes from. When Saul realized Jesus as Lord, things got changed. We hear Luke’s description on conversion of Saul – real change in his life. When Jesus was understood as Lord, the life of Saul went upside down.

I assume what would be a real change of a person. Growing up in a small town in South Korea, we used to go church on Thursday evenings. Unlike Christian lives these days, back then, we went to church on Sunday morning for worship, Sunday evening for a dedication service for local or global

mission, and Midweek service on Wednesday evening, and Children’s service on Thursday evening with most case bible story, and class meeting on Friday Evenings.

All the children were waiting for Thursday evenings for bible story. One day, we had a trouble. Holding a sickle, a drunken young man was screaming at the entrance of the church. No one controlled and stopped him. Seeing the scene in a distance on my way to church with mother, I thought that there would be no church that evening.

Mother approached to the drunken young man and grabbed his arms with her hands and said: Son, “You shouldn’t do that. Don’t persecute Jesus. Leave from wine bottles and follow Jesus! He is the Lord!” “Use your power and anxiety for the Lord!” Suddenly, he turned into a kid – quiet and gentle. Later, he became the most faithful member of the church. Many friends in the town came to faith. Real change took place. We still talk about this young man, who is mid 50s. He is great leader of the church and in the town.

We have to ask ourselves a question about Jesus. Is Jesus your Lord? If the answer is not clear, we cannot expect to have a great church. Lordship demands the absolute obedience. Lordship requires of serious commitment. If we have clear equation, Jesus = Lord, we don’t have problem with size of the church. In fact, we may have problem, because for many Jesus wasn’t Lord of lords and King of kings.

When Jesus is the Lord, our priority becomes what the Lord, Jesus would like to see.

2. *Without knowing it, many go against God.*

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You and I can be like Saul, who was breathing murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. You and I can be like some folks who are breathing murderous threats against other family members at home.

Beware of this! You are not the measure of all things. Jesus is the Way. He is the measure of all things.

Luke 4:18-19 ¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

If you are not happy with Jesus, because he heals the sick, feeds the hungry, and spend time with the sinners, you may go against God without knowing it.

If you are not happy with someone in your household, in your neighborhood, and at your work, be serious about whether you claim yourself as measure of all things. Without knowing it you may go against the direction of the organization you belong.

If you don't agree with Jesus who has opened the church to the people of all ages, genders, nations and races, you'd better learn quickly a way to learn about Jesus. Otherwise, you don't help the church. Without knowing it, you go against to God.

If you discover yourself in a wrong path, leave immediately from the road. You have to make greater effort to get out of it. Run away from it as quickly as possible.

Particularly young friends, say good-bye to the all kinds of spiritual force of wickedness. Pray to God for help. "Deliver us from evil." Meet a companion of Christ for a help. Have counseling with pastor or any other person of good faith.

3. Encountering Jesus helps us find the true way of salvation.

Find Jesus. Learn the right path from him.

Colossians 2:9-12 ⁹ For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, ¹⁰ and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. ¹¹ In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, ¹² having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

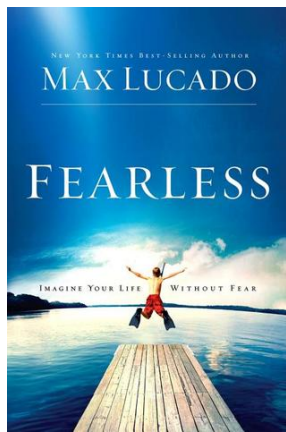
In his letter to Colossians, the Apostle Paul addresses Jesus is the power of God, who raised him from the dead. Study Jesus and his teaching. Learn from him and become more like Him.

Fear of aging in America

A recent national survey conducted for the Home Instead Senior Care network found that 74 percent of seniors 65 and older say that staying physically active is a major challenge. Adult caregivers see the problem as well: 81 percent of adult caregivers listed staying physically active as a top challenge for seniors. That challenge led 90 percent of seniors in the survey to report their greatest fear as loss of independence.¹ The survey revealed seniors have these other fears as well about the future, beginning with the greatest fear and in descending order:

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1. Loss of independence
2. Declining health
3. Running out of money
4. Not being able to live at home
5. Death of a spouse or other family member
6. Inability to manage their own activities of daily living
7. Not being able to drive
8. Isolation or loneliness
9. Strangers caring for them
10. Fear of falling or hurting themselves



They're talking layoffs at work, slowdowns in the economy, flare-ups in the Middle East, turnovers at headquarters, downturns in the housing market, upswings in global warming. The plague of our day, terrorism, begins with the word "terror." Fear, it seems, has taken up a hundred-year lease on the building next door and set up shop. Oversized and rude, fear herds us into a prison of unlocked doors. Wouldn't it be great to

walk out?

Imagine your life, wholly untouched by angst. What if faith, not fear, was your default reaction to threats? If you could hover a fear magnet over your heart and extract every last shaving of dread, insecurity, or doubt, what would remain? Envision a day, just one day, where you could trust more and fear less.

4. Make a friend in Christ for the act of transformation.

Saul meets a great friend, Ananias. His life turns around with him.

Ananias ([/ænoʻnaɪəs/ AN-ə-NY-əs](#); Ancient Greek: Ἀνανίας, same as Hebrew חנניא, [Hananiah](#), "favoured of the LORD"), was disciple of Jesus at Damascus mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles in the Bible, which describes how he was sent by Jesus to restore the sight of "Saul, of Tarsus" (known later as Paul the Apostle) and provide him with additional instruction in the way of the Lord.

According to Catholic tradition, Ananias was martyred in [Eleutheropolis](#).^[4] Ananias is also listed by Hippolytus of Rome and others as one of the Seventy Disciples whose mission is recorded in Luke 10:1-20.

F. F. Bruce suggests that Ananias "has an honoured place in sacred history, and a special claim upon the gratitude of all who in one way or another have entered into the blessing that stems from the life and work of the great apostle."

In Damascus, a Jewish Christian, Ananias (Acts 9:10-17; 22:12-16), who is a devout observer of the law and well spoken of by all the Jews has a vision of Christ, who sends him to lay hands on Paul and cure his blindness, to baptize him so that he may wash away sins and be filled with the Holy Spirit.²

² "Ananias", ABD, I, pp. 224-225.

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I strongly feel like Ananias as a great image of pastor. Pastor is like a coach.

Simply stated, coaches are change experts who help leaders take responsibility to maximize their own potential.

Learning to coach is learning to set up relationships that provide the exact kind of support a leader needs to radically pursue his or her God-given destiny. A coach is a true friend and a close confidant on the path of life, someone who often hears, “I’ve never told this to anyone before, but...” A coach is someone who sees you as made in the image of God, and tells you the truth about who you really are. A coach pushes you to think, to stretch yourself, to take responsibility for your life and get done what you know you need to do. A coach is also someone who will hold you accountable, challenge you to live out your values or even occasionally give you a swift kick in the pants when you need it.

Coaches are many things, but the essence of coaching is believing in people. Nothing is more empowering, nothing causes us to reach higher and accomplish greater good than having people in our lives who love us for who we are and believe in us unconditionally. That is what Christ does for us — love us for who we were made to be. Coaching is a conscious imitation of the way that Jesus looks at us and the way that God develops leaders.

Definitions of Coaching

“Coaches are change experts who help leaders take responsibility to maximize their own potential.”

“Coaching is like having a personal trainer for every area of your life.”

“Coaching is the discipline of believing in people to empower them to change.”

“Coaching is unlocking a person’s potential to maximize their growth.” John Whitmore

“Coaching is the art and practice of guiding a person or group from where they are toward the greater competence and fulfillment that they desire.” Gary Collins

“Mentoring is imparting to you what God has given me; coaching is drawing out of you what God has put in you.” Dale Stoll

<http://www.christiancoachingcenter.org/index.php/2009/03/wh-at-is-coaching/>

5. Live a faithful life as an instrument of God’s peace.

In the 1924 Olympics, a Scottish man named Eric Liddell won the gold medal in the 400 m track and field event. He was a young man raised on the mission field of China, just finishing his college years in Scotland and getting ready to return to China as a missionary. But first, he was pouring himself into his love of running. His story was captured in the 1981 award-winning film, Chariots of Fire. There’s a scene in the film where his sister, herself a missionary and eager to get back to China, challenges his dedication to running.

“Why do you go to all the trouble?” she asks him. Eric replies, “I believe God made me for a purpose in China. But he also made me fast. And when I run, I feel his pleasure.”

Like the Peace Prayer of St. Francis, this story marvelously captures the essence of the Christian’s

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call. Both suggest that God reaches out to his children and invites us to be his instruments—runners in the race, instruments of his peace, sowers of his love. Both suggest that he equips us to respond. And both illustrate that, when we do as the Peace Prayer asks, which is to align ourselves with God’s deepest desire, we will experience what kingdom living looks like—in giving we receive, in pardoning we are pardoned, in dying we are born. We will bring God glory—the fullness of all he is and all he made us to be. And we will know his pleasure.

(From ACE, University of Nortre Dame, IN)³

We have a problem. Whether we understand ourselves as the instruments of God. Whether we want God to be our instrument.

Learn who you are and whose you are. That’s is beginning of finding of the direction of our church and the spiritual journey of our own. May God bless you on your continuous examination about God’s purpose on you!

Keys: 1. Lord; 2. against; 3. true; 4. friend; 5. instrument

³ The Alliance for Catholic Education responds to the needs of the Church’s educational mission through service to children in elementary and secondary schools and strives to sustain, strengthen, and transform Catholic schools. Housed in the [Institute for Educational Initiatives](#) at the University of Notre Dame, ACE has become one of the university’s most far-reaching enterprises, present in hundreds of schools, dozens of U.S. Catholic dioceses, and several foreign countries. By preparing teachers and school leaders, providing a range of state-of-the-art services to schools, and facilitating widespread awareness, enthusiasm, and hope, ACE seeks to ensure that none of today’s social and economic hurdles will keep any child from experiencing the gift of an excellent Catholic education. 107 Carole Sandner Hall, Notre Dame, IN 46556 P: 574.631.7052 F: 574.631.7939 E: ace.1@nd.edu