



St. Paul Lutheran Church

“Your Refuge from the Storm”

LifeGroup

May 5, 2024
Acts 22:3-16

Community

TODAY'S THEME

Paul is on the steps of the temple in Jerusalem, faced with the opportunity to share his personal testimony, his story of his life with Jesus. We see in Paul's account his deep love for Jesus. We, too, are called to know our story and be ready to boldly share that story with others.

WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO KNOW?

Everyone has a story to tell. We want small group participants to begin to believe that their faith story is worth sharing, and then share it with others.

WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO DO?

We want small group participants to look back over their lives and assemble the story of their faith so that, when given the opportunity, they can articulate that story to someone else.

ICEBREAKER

In her song *The Story*, Brandi Carlisle sings “and these stories don't mean anything unless you have someone to tell them to. I was made for you.” How true. In other words, we were made in community and for community. Our story matters, and so does sharing it with others. A small group experience is one of the best ways for stories to be shared.

Every good story has a good beginning. *A Tale of Two Cities* begins with “it was the best of times, it was the worst of times. ...” What is the first sentence in your personal story? Where does your story begin? (*Share your birthplace, and something that might be unique about where you grew up.*)

PRAY TOGETHER

Father God, your story is a narrative of rebellion and redemption, of separation and homecoming. You love us as no other, and we pray that you will help us see how our story is connected to your activity throughout all of human history. Our story is one of rebellion and redemption, of separation and homecoming. Help us to tell our story to one another in ways that inspire us to greater faith in you. Amen.

Content

In these last chapters of Acts, it's all adventure! Last week's story was Paul's vision of a “man in Macedonia pleading” for spiritual help. That “man” turns out to be a woman: Lydia, the cloth merchant. Paul and his fellow travelers have the opportunity to tell their story, which results in Lydia and her family being baptized.

In the passage for this week, five chapters later, Paul is once again in story mode. Paul has, by God's grace, concluded his three missionary journeys (21:16) and is in the midst of what some call his fourth missionary journey.

Verse 17 begins: “When we arrived in Jerusalem, the brothers welcomed us warmly.” But things go from good to bad when, after a week, Paul is seized by a group of Jews who “stir up the whole crowd.” They accuse Paul of false teaching and, apparently even worse, bringing Greeks into the temple, defiling the holy place.

Luke tells us that “all the city was aroused, and the people rushed together.” They seize Paul, drag him out of the temple and beat him in an attempt to kill him. They've nearly done so when the tribune and the soldiers step in to rescue him, or at least try to quell the crowd. Adding insult to injury, they order Paul to be bound with chains.

It's only then that they ask him who he is, and what he has done. Again the crowd is stirred into an uproar and Paul has to be carried away to safety to the soldier's barracks.

This is the important immediate backdrop for the text for this Sunday. Paul, who has been beaten, bloodied, bruised and whatever, asks the tribune, “May I say something to you?” He asks for permission to address the crowd that has just tried to kill him.

“Brothers and fathers ...” Paul begins his faith defense before these Jews the same way that Stephen did in Acts 7:2, an indication that Stephen's last words caught in Paul's heart all these years.

Read Acts 22:3-16.

DISCUSSION

If you were Paul, would your instinct have been to stand up and speak again? What are the highlights of his story? Look back over the verses and identify the key story lines. This story has a lot of drama. Are there two extremes you can identify in Paul's story?

GOING DEEPER

In verses 3-21, Paul shares his faith story with the crowd. Perhaps he believes he's got nothing to lose. Or maybe his passion for telling the story of true transformation is what drives him. Paul does

some very strategic things through his story that set us up for the application of this passage:

He speaks their language. In verse 2, Paul addresses them in Hebrew, or Aramaic, their own language.

DISCUSSION Do you know any other languages? Have you had experiences *not* knowing a language? How important was it for Paul to speak Hebrew to this audience?

He talks about who inspired him. In verse 3, Paul reveals that he studied under Gamaliel, the most revered teacher of the time.

DISCUSSION Who is on the list of people who have inspired you? Why are they important in your faith story? Was their primary inspiration what they said, or how they lived?

He is honest about his past, his doubts, and his failure. In verses 4-5, Paul describes the evil he committed against those following the Way. He comes clean with his past.

DISCUSSION Not everything in our past is pretty. How important is reconciling your past in order to move into your future? Are there some extreme contrasts in your faith journey between who you were and who you are today?

He talks about his encounter with God. In verse 6, Paul describes how God met him where he was.

DISCUSSION Talk about a time when you encountered God. Where was it? What was it like? How has it shaped your story?

He asks two critical questions. In verse 8, Paul asks the very question each of us must ask: “Who are you, Lord?” In verse 10, he asks, “What am I to do, Lord?”

DISCUSSION Can you discern when God is active in your life? How do you differentiate between God’s activity and pure luck?

He relies on those around him for spiritual help. In verse 11, Paul realizes his limitation and seeks the help of his brothers in the faith to assist him.

DISCUSSION Who can you count on for spiritual help? Can your small group be a place for spiritual help? Are you willing to let your group be that for you?

He seeks his mentor in the faith. In verse 13, Paul describes how Ananias (a “devout man according to the law, and well spoken of by all the Jews living there”) comes alongside him, and speaks God’s intention for him, and directs him to get up, be baptized and call on his name. The rest, as they say, is history.

DISCUSSION Who do you look to for spiritual direction? Is there a difference between a spiritual helper and a spiritual mentor?

Application

Each of us has a faith story and, with a bit of help, each of us can be equipped to tell that story. Yet, telling our faith story can be intimidating. Most people have never taken the opportunity to craft their story so that others, even in their own family, can learn from it. Yet, with some clear patterns and models, that telling can be transformational for both the person telling it and the person hearing it. Hopefully, this small group experience helped you learn what a faith story is, and that your story is as valid as the next.

This week, continue to formulate your faith story. You may want to write it down or put it on a timeline. You might want to connect with those people in your past who have served as spiritual helpers and mentors, and thank them for what they have given to you.

PRAY TOGETHER

Father God, you are writing our story and connecting it to your story throughout history. A story that once was filled with covenant community was shattered by sin and now needs your redemption and reconciliation. This week, help us identify our faith story, thank those who helped write that story, and see how you continue to write and rewrite our story each day. We are your covenant people who want to live in a dynamic daily relationship with you. Amen.

ADDITIONAL CONVERSATION AND REFLECTION

Go, For I Will Send You

ACTS 22:17

Consider the impact that Jesus’ words had on Paul: “Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.” Not only had Paul’s life just been radically changed, but now he’s sent off on a mission far away! Our lives have also been radically changed through our faith in Christ, and, like Paul, we are sent on a mission. For some of us that mission may be far away, but for most of us it is quite near: in our home, neighborhood, classroom, office, or the sidelines of a child’s soccer game. Wherever you are, that’s your mission field. That’s where Jesus has sent you! Who is God calling you to reach with the good news of Jesus Christ?

Acts 22:3-16 NLT Then Paul said, "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, and I was brought up and educated here in Jerusalem under Gamaliel. As his student, I was carefully trained in our Jewish laws and customs. I became very zealous to honor God in everything I did, just like all of you today. (4) And I persecuted the followers of the Way, hounding some to death, arresting both men and women and throwing them in prison. (5) The high priest and the whole council of elders can testify that this is so. For I received letters from them to our Jewish brothers in Damascus, authorizing me to bring the followers of the Way from there to Jerusalem, in chains, to be punished. (6) "As I was on the road, approaching Damascus about noon, a very bright light from heaven suddenly shone down around me. (7) I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' (8) "Who are you, lord?" I asked. "And the voice replied, 'I am Jesus the Nazarene, the one you are persecuting.' (9) The people with me saw the light but didn't understand the voice speaking to me. (10) "I asked, 'What should I do, Lord?' "And the Lord told me, 'Get up and go into Damascus, and there you will be told everything you are to do.' (11) "I was blinded by the intense light and had to be led by the hand to Damascus by my companions. (12) A man named Ananias lived there. He was a godly man, deeply devoted to the law, and well regarded by all the Jews of Damascus. (13) He came and stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, regain your sight.' And that very moment I could see him! (14) "Then he told me, 'The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and hear him speak. (15) For you are to be his witness, telling everyone what you have seen and heard. (16) What are you waiting for? Get up and be baptized. Have your sins washed away by calling on the name of the Lord.'