

The Lord seems to have a different way of revealing himself to each one of us. For me it was a matter of putting someone in my path who knew him and shared the reality with me. When I had checked out what she said through prayer and his answers, his presence makes more sense to me than any of the alternatives that I used to hold. When he spoke to me through my friend, he led me to try him and see if he was real.

For me, the first miracle he showed me was my own children, after the doctor had said “no way.” He also healed my organist from cancer when I had just begun my ministry in a small parish. It was a matter of doing what he said and seeing that he was faithful in responding.

He needed to do something more profound to get Saul’s attention, so he knocked him off his horse and spoke to him telling him to go on into town and he would be told what to do from there. Saul had no alternative. He was blind and needed the help of his travel companions. He received what he needed to get his attention—like we all do.

1 Samuel 13:19—14:15; Psalms 140, 142; Luke 23:26-31

Saturday - July 4

Acts 9:10-19a *And the Lord said to him, “Rise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for a man of Tarsus named Saul; for behold, he is praying, and he has seen a man named Anani’as come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.”* (vv.11-12)

One of the things that I have found more than once in my walk with God is that He sends me to do some things that I cannot do. As it turns out, there is nothing that He can’t do through me if I am willing. When He calls, I have learned to walk into the impossible situation to see what He really has in mind.

I know of no other way for Ananias to find out what God had in mind, or for any of us today, except to try out what God calls us to do and allow Him the freedom to use us in the same way He used Ananias in Saul’s life.

When the Lord calls, it is not a matter of making sense to human beings. It is a matter of human beings obeying to see what He plans to do through us to further the spread of His Kingdom. For Ananias, it was to release the tremendous ministry of Saint Paul. For us it may be something similar.

1 Samuel 14:16-30; Psalms 137, 144; Luke 23:32-43

by Al Durrance

Used with permission from the BIBLE READING FELLOWSHIP
P. O. Box 380, Winter Park, FL 32790
www.biblereading.org

Sunday, June 28

Matthew 21:23-32 *And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching and said, “By what authority are you doing these things and who gave you this authority?”* (v.23 RSV)

Every time I hear the word “authority” used, it brings to mind a vision of Jesus’ temptation and his rejection of the authority of the world that Satan offered, and his later teaching of his disciples that his authority is not to Lord it over anyone, but to serve and set free.

It has to do with what I am, rather than what I can make you do. It is not so much enforcing a law by compelling someone else to do what I demand of them; it is more a matter of enabling someone to get rid of sin that makes one act contrary to the law, and to get on impelled by the Love of God to fulfill His will. It enables others to choose to obey and then obey.

When the Church embraces the authority that we have been given by God, we will ignore the arguments and stay with the prayer to set people free from bondage to sin and set them free to receive and embrace the will of the Living God who gives us authority over evil and enables us to walk in the perfect freedom of His service.

God has never compelled me to do anything. He has called me out of sin and enabled me by His authority to be set free to walk with Him. I am still working with Him on my freedom, and His authority is still giving me the grace I need to grow.

1 Samuel 10:1-16; Psalm 118; Romans 4:13-25

Monday, June 29

Luke 22:52-62 *But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are saying.” And immediately, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly.* (vv.60-62)

I used to live with the idea that I was in control of my own behavior. I knew what I would and would not do, but I often changed my mind at the last minute when to show integrity would lead other people to think bad things about me. When I thought I would look good and righteous, I would be honest and brag about it, and in those times when I would not, I would tell a little lie and justify it.

Jesus had warned Peter what to look for and Peter, as long as he was talking with Jesus, was in control. Jesus told him what was going to happen and Peter swore by all that he believed about his control of his behavior that he would be loyal unto death.

I am sure that when Jesus turned and looked at Peter, his look said “I told you Peter, and I want you to know that I love you anyway, but you are going to need the grace that the Holy Spirit will bring in order to grow into the commitment you will need to stand up and be counted under any circumstances.” Peter learned that at Pentecost. I learned it when I needed to stand firm in my faith and in the grace that the Holy Spirit still brings to those who are willing to put their trust in God, and not what other people think of them.

When we are set free to walk in Jesus’ love, we are set free to let other people think what they will, and we remain free from having to please people.

1 Samuel 10:17-27; Psalm 106:1-18; Acts 7:44—8:1a

Tuesday, June 30

Acts 8:1-13 *And the multitudes with one accord gave heed to what was said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs which he did. For unclean spirits came out of many who were possessed, crying with a loud voice; and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed.* (vv.6-7)

The Gospel was not something that sought intellectual agreement. It was a message that was proclaimed and made manifest with power to heal and set free. In this account about Philip preaching in Samaria, there was even the conversion of a magician, or sorcerer, who had made his living performing amazing deeds and actions.

When I first heard the Gospel it came out like: “Jesus loves you, so just believe in his Name and do what he told us and when you die, you will go to heaven and not to hell.” As I began to try it out, I found that it is a call to live in the Kingdom *now*, knowing the King and being changed by what he does *now*. I have found that Jesus is still using his disciples to heal and set people free from bondage to the world.

When my abusive anger became intolerable, I was led by the Lord to someone who was willing to cast it out. When he cast it out, my alcohol addiction left with it; so I can say that the Kingdom of God has come near and it demonstrated more power than the powers of darkness.

That is what happened in Samaria in such a way that Simon the Magician was converted, baptized, and went after Philip to assist him in his ministry. When you know the power, it’s hard to say “No.”

1 Samuel 11:1-15; Psalms 120, 121, 122, 123; Luke 22:63-71

Wednesday, July 1

Acts 8:14-25 *Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.* (vv.14-16)

There was no assumption made in the early church about Baptism and the Holy Spirit’s reception. It was important to see that the people who were

newly baptized also received the Holy Spirit if they had not already done so. In Acts 10:44-48, Peter was preaching to Cornelius’ household and the Holy Spirit fell on those who heard. It was reckoned as a sign that they should be baptized in water to complete the acts of knitting together the new converts and the Lord.

In the Charismatic Renewal of the late 60’s and early 70’s, it was important that the leaders see obvious signs like the gift of tongues to be assured that the Holy Spirit had been received, but it has seemed to me that it is the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace—that we *all* need, and it is the Holy Spirit who comes to cultivate that garden within us where they grow.

In my experience, it doesn’t seem to matter how much Holy Spirit we have, but rather how much of us the Holy Spirit has. Have we given as much as we can to as much of God as we know?

The other thing that impressed me was the penitence of Simon when Peter condemned him for trying to buy the power to transmit the Holy Spirit. When we want the best, we try to get it; but we don’t want to lose what we have already received.

1 Samuel 12:1-6, 16-25; Psalm 119:145-176; Luke 23:1-12

Thursday, July 2

Luke 23:13-25 *(Pilate said) “Behold, nothing deserving death has been done by him; I will therefore chastise him and release him.” But they all cried out together, “Away with this man and release for us Barab’bas” —a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder.* (vv.15-19)

The Jews were looking for a Messiah of their own design. They were looking for one who would come with an army and throw off the Roman yoke and exalt the temple and its use. The kingdom they were looking for was not a kingdom of love but of law, a kingdom that would mete out punishment where they could be in control.

Jesus gave them no indication that was what he had in mind. He seemed rather to be building a kingdom of love. That was quite a shock to me when I realized that he was not going to demand that we conform to justice the way I saw it. He took my sin and suffered for it, and he gave me his life that I did not deserve.

When I finished thinking about that for a while, I was free to step out of the crowd and shout, “Away with Barabbas. Give me Jesus. He’s the only hope I have of being justified.”

1 Samuel 13:5-18; Psalms 131, 132, 133; Acts 8:26-40

Friday, July 3

Acts 9:1-9 *Now as he journeyed he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him. And he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting; but rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.”* (vv.3-6)