



NATIVE AMERICAN MINISTRIES SUNDAY

THE WAY: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." He answered, "Here I am, Lord." The Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come

in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name." But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is an

instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name

ACTS 9:1-20, NRSV

before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God."

REFLECTION

In this encounter with Jesus, Saul has a remarkable transformative experience. With the help of the disciple, Ananias, who bravely trusts God, Saul is filled with the Holy Spirit and turns his life completely



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around. With this change of heart, this former persecutor of Christians answers God's call to follow "The Way" and bring the good news of Jesus Christ to "Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel."

- Isn't that what God can do in our communities?
- Isn't that what God can do with United Methodist churches?
- Isn't that what God does with you and me?

God's amazing grace is a standing invitation to "The Way" of repentance, healing, forgiveness and love.

Today, United Methodist churches around the U.S. celebrate Native American Ministries Sunday. We have the opportunity to live out our commitment to "The Way" with specific action.

United Methodist Native American the Rev. Chebon Kernell is part of the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma. He shares that today's special offering makes an impact on Native American communities. He writes,

"Native American United Methodist communities have partnered with tribal governments and local churches to assist in providing opportunities for education and advocacy. Numerous Native

congregations from across the country have begun to implement ministries for youth and children that teach enhanced appreciation for tribal identity and recognizing tribal characteristics. Native congregations have also begun to host events addressing some of the social ailments that plague Native communities and offering churches and tribal members tools to reverse the trends that are found in Native American communities."

Sadly, our institutional church history is not filled with grace and love. Some shameful places must be brought out of the shadows and healed in order for us fully and authentically to follow "The Way" of Jesus.

In 2012, the United Methodist General Conference participated in an act of repentance for the healing of relationships with indigenous people. Annual conferences hosted individual services of repentance and committed:

- to educate ourselves about the full history of our country and our church in relation to Native Americans,
- to pursue healing with our Native American sisters and brothers, and
- to contribute to a special offering that supports United Methodist ministries in these communities.



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QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How will you honor this commitment to Native Americans made in the act of repentance?
2. We read that Saul was “breathing threats and murder.” What happens when we become so fundamental in our rules that we see anyone who believes differently as a threat? Do you not engage with some people because their politics or religion differs from yours? How can you build relationships?
3. What does Jesus mean when he says, “I am Jesus, the one whom you are persecuting”? Who are the people today who experience religious or other persecution?
4. Where is the brokenness in your life? What situations or relationships need the power of divine transformation? How might joy emerge from the pain that you experience?
5. How do your interactions with your neighbors reflect “The Way?” How does your lifestyle serve as an invitation to those who do not have a church home or who may have felt hurt by the church in the past? Where do you see movements of “The Way” of Christ happening in your community?
6. Through his relationship with Jesus, Saul goes from persecuting Christians to living as a Christian. How do you think the early Christians felt seeing Saul turn his life around? Did they believe him? Do you have people in your life whom you hesitate to trust again? How does this account of redemption help you to offer forgiveness?

CLOSING PRAYER

Divine Creator, thank you for your land, your water and your people. I acknowledge and confess that the place where I live was taken at the expense of the Native people. Just as you transformed Saul to repair his harm to followers of “The Way”, help me to repair the harm done to the indigenous people in our area. In the name of the Prince of Peace, I pray. Amen.

FOR DEEPER STUDY, READING AND DISCUSSION

On This Spirit Walk: The Voices of Native American and Indigenous by Henrietta Mann, Anita Phillips
Faith and Facts Card about Indigenous People: <https://www.umcjustice.org/documents/23>



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