



SAINT MARK'S

EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*A Easter 5, Acts 7:55-60
St. Mark's, Little Rock, 5-14-17
Danny Schieffler*

As a young man

Saul had all the promise in the world.

By training he was a righteous Pharisee

a member of the tribe of Benjamin

and a man zealous for God--

at least in Saul's own mind

Today in the lesson from Acts though

we see a misguided Saul

taking part in the stoning of St. Stephen

one of the original deacons in the early church

and now the first Christian martyr.

They say the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church

But in this chapter it is hard to see anything good

growing out of Stephen's death.

Apparently

Saul was not old enough to actually stone a man.

And so Saul watched the witness's

expensive coats

while the witnesses did the deed.

And so at this point

as chapter 7 in the Book of Acts comes to a close,

that's about all we know about Saul--

Once so full of promise

but now

not so much.

And if like you are inclined to think that Saul
is not typical when it comes to God's people in the Bible.

Then you and I are on the same page
Nevertheless, let's look at some others
Consider Moses for a moment
We see him today as the deliverer
of the Hebrew slaves
But go back to those days in the desert
in Midian
in the Sinai peninsula.

Remember Moses had fled Egypt as a murderer
In anger one day
he had killed an Egyptian construction foreman
but now Moses is on the run
living in hiding .

Once a prince of Egypt
Now a goat herder

And if that were the end of Moses' story
we'd have to acknowledge
a once bright future
now burns dimly
if at all.

Or take the prophet Jeremiah
Jeremiah was only boy
when he at first refused God's call
In fact,
Jeremiah protested
And he told God as much

He said
But I'm but only a boy
I can't do that.
Nobody will listen to me.

And if that were the end of Jeremiah's story
And if that we all we knew about Jeremiah
We'd have to admit

he'll never amount to much.

Or take the shepherd boy, David.

His father Jesse had some fine son's

Seven, in fact,

So fine that that

they caught the attention of the prophet Samuel

when it came time

to anoint a new king for the nation.

One by one

Samuel looked at each of those seven sons.

But Samuel did not choose any of the seven

For God does not look on outward appearances

God looks at the heart.

There was one more son, however,

The youngest

But he

was nowhere to be found

He was out tending sheep

Apparently, his own father

thought so little of him

that he didn't even present him to Samuel.

And if that were the last chapter in David's story

We wouldn't even be talking about him today.

And Consider for a moment

Someone from the New Testament

Consider Mary Magdalene.

We often remember Mary

for her faithfulness and devotion to Jesus

She was one of the few

who courage to watch his crucifixion

or the courage to go to the tomb that first Easter morning

while it was still being guarded by soldiers.

But you'll also remember

there was a time

the Scripture says

when Mary had seven demons.
Now I don't know exactly what that means.
But something
 something very powerful had a hold of Mary
 And it was destroying her life
And again if that had been the end of Mary's story
 much like Saul's story
 we'd have to call it a tragedy today.
This week as I watched or heard about several
 disturbing things happening in our world
 and in our own community,
 I was reminded how easy it is
 to let our outlook and sometimes
 even our faith
 be defined
 by things happening
 in the present .

Because sometimes
 Without realizing it
 We let the story of the present
 Become the whole story
 Forgetting
 That author of life
Still has many chapters yet to write in this world
 And chapters yet to write in your life
 in the life of your family
 and mine.

And we forget
 that though in the today's lesson
 others may have discounted and dismissed Saul
 God did not
 because God wasn't through with Saul's story
And though Saul did not know it
 Saul would soon become Paul
 And would soon be a living witness

That Jesus Christ truly is alive
and because He is alive
there is not a single story in this whole world
that cannot be redeemed and rewritten

by God's mercy,
God's power,
God's forgiveness and love.

And just as God had more chapters to write
for Moses, Jeremiah, David Mary, Paul
and countless others of faith
God has more chapters for us
and for the world.

So keep the faith
Trust in God
And bring more than bread and wine to the altar
Bring yourself
Let a new chapter begin.