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Acts 9:1-22

“Christ Alive” Series: “Power & Impact”

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Imagine if the pastors of your church had the power to do miracles! Imagine Pastor Lew and myself smiting people, or healing people, or bringing people back to from the dead. Imagine Pastor Wagner and Pastor Lineberger (on a retired, part-time basis) being able to knock people down with a flash of heavenly light, and strike them with blindness – like Jesus did to Saul in our Bible story. Imagine our DCE’s (Miss Beth, Mr. Steve, Mr. Wesley) laying their hands on people, and miraculously converting them to Christian faith. Imagine Vicar Kevin having the power to turn a bottle of water into a nice IPA or Chardonnay.

Imagine if our church had that kind of power and impact! Would the community be fascinated and drawn in? Would people believe such miracles? Or would they scoff, be scared, and stay away?

Well, our church staff most assuredly can’t do miracles. Steve can make really good balloon animals, Wesley can climb a rock wall, and Beth bakes ridiculous cupcakes; but, aside from that, we have only a few other talents and abilities among us collectively. No super-powers.

Nor have I noticed any super-humans sitting in the pews here at Hope, either. We’re all mere humans; weak, flawed, imperfect, sin-ridden people. Pastors, DCE’s, vicar, laypeople, all of us.

So what kind of power can this church possibly have? What impact can we really make on our community?

We heard the story earlier about the power and impact of Christ overwhelming a man named Saul. This guy, Saul, was an arrogant, angry man. He was convinced that Christians were just fools, that Christ was a fake, that the rumors of Christ's resurrection were completely unfounded.

So Saul got on his horse, he got the authority from the Jewish rulers to hunt down and arrest anybody who believed in Jesus Christ, and he got busy. Saul was an eager persecutor of the early Christian Church.

Until one day on the road to Damascus, Jesus appeared to him. The risen Lord, the living Christ, knocked Saul down with a flash of heavenly light (Pastor Wagner style), struck him with blindness, and called him out. "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do."

And from that moment on, Saul was a changed man. He knew in his heart that Christ was alive, that Jesus was God, that the story of the resurrection was true.

And it wasn't just the power of Christ that changed Saul. It was the love of Christ. Saul came to know that the Lord Jesus is the Lord of mercy. That he loves and values sinners. That he died for Saul's sins. That he never gives up on the worst of humanity. And this love of Christ made a profound impact on Saul's life. When his blindness went away, his spiritual blindness went away, too. Saul became

an apostle, a missionary, a leader in the very Church he was trying to destroy.

The power and impact of Christ is spectacular. It's brilliant!

But what about his Church? What about the Church of Christ today? What about our church, Hope Lutheran? On a scale of 1 to 10, if Christ's power and impact are a perfect 10, what would ours be? A 1? A 2? 0?

We can't do miracles. We don't smite people. We don't strike confirmation students who don't turn in their sermon summaries with blindness. Our words can't change a person's heart, like Christ's did.

But here's the thing. Christ's words still have level-10 power. And Christ's love still makes a level-10 impact. Our daily work as a church is not to try to muster up or duplicate Christ's power and impact. Our job is simply to share Christ's words, and to live out Christ's love. He's the one who changes people's hearts. Christ is the one who converts, who calls to faith, who guards the faith of his followers. Our mission as a church? Just lead people to the living Christ, and let his power and impact have their way.

Hope's mission statement says it: "The people of Hope Lutheran Church proclaim and live the Word and love of Christ."

There's a story I want to tell you today. But I can't. It's a very personal story, about someone who worships here at this church. And this person's story gives testimony to the modern-day power and impact of Christ. So while I'm not going to share the personal and private details, I will just say

that this person's life is changing in a miraculous way. The power of Christ's words, as read and studied in the Bible, as taken to heart and wrestled with in a serious way, is changing this person. The impact of Christ's love, as shared by believers and disciples in this church, is making a huge impact on this person's life. It's a great story, and I hope you can respect why I'm not telling you all the details.

But I want you all to know that this is why we're here, as a church. Christ is alive in our midst. Christ is active in our church. Christ is speaking to people's hearts, and bringing them to faith, in this wonderful place. Not everybody's story is as dramatic and bold as Saul's story in the Bible; but the Lord Jesus Christ is showing his power and impacting his people here daily.

So recommit with me today to our mission. We're here to reach more people for Christ, right? We're here to proclaim and live the powerful Word and the impactful love of Christ in our community. Say "Amen" if you will recommit with me today to that mission.

Ok, I know, that wasn't very Lutheran. But we'll be ok.

You know, there's a whole lot of folks out there who are not ok. And they are our mission. People who don't know Jesus Christ. People who don't know God loves them. People who are marginalized by society, disenfranchised from their church, disconnected from their Maker. People who are struggling to make sense of college campus shootings, teenage drowning deaths, and all the hardships of this world.

These are the people of Christ. The people Christ came to save. And we have a mission, don't we? Proclaim and live

the powerful Word and the impactful love of Christ. Let's do something a bit more Lutheran. Let's pray.