

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth

Sunday, October 18th, 2026

Rev. Gerry Gallant

The Shepherd Who Sought a Wolf

Proper 24

Acts 9:1-19

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship

Come, let us worship the Lord Jesus Christ, the Light who shines in the darkness.

He has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Come, all who are weary, guilty, and in need of mercy.

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

Let us bow before our risen King, who seeks the lost and makes all things new.

To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus, throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Prayer of Adoration and Invocation

Holy and sovereign God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you dwell in unapproachable light, yet in mercy you draw near to sinners through Jesus Christ. We adore you for your holiness, wisdom, power, and steadfast love. You created us for your glory, uphold us by your providence, redeem your people by the blood of your Son, and give life through your Spirit. As we gather, turn our eyes from ourselves to Christ. Silence every distraction, humble every proud heart, comfort every burdened soul, and receive our worship through our great High Priest. Speak to us by your Word, strengthen us by your grace, and make us glad in the glory of your name. **Amen.**

Call to Confession

The light of Christ reveals not only the glory of our Savior but also the darkness of our sin. We have trusted our own wisdom, resisted the Lord's rule, and failed to love his people as we ought. Yet God invites us to draw near with a true heart, confessing our sins in the confidence that Jesus Christ is a merciful and faithful High Priest. Let us therefore humble ourselves and confess our sins together.

Prayer of Confession

Merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed. We have been confident in ourselves and slow to listen to your Word. We have pursued our own way, resisted your commands, and failed to love our neighbours and your church. We have not honoured Christ as Lord or depended upon your Spirit as we ought. Forgive us for the sake of Jesus, who bore our guilt upon the cross and rose for our salvation. Turn us from darkness to light, from self-rule to glad obedience, and from fear to faith. By your Spirit, renew us in the image of Christ, that we may walk in the good works you have prepared for us. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Hear the good news: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." God does not justify us because of our sincerity, our sorrow, or our works, but by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Jesus was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. To all who repent and trust in him, I declare the promise of the gospel: in Christ, your sins are forgiven. Thanks be to God.

Childrens' Song #319: "Wherever I May Wonder"

Wherever I may wander,
 wherever I may be,
 I'm certain of my Maker's love;
 God's care is over me.
 God made the great high mountains,
 and made the wide blue sea;
 God made the sky where airplanes fly;
 God made the world, and me.

Throughout the whole creation,
 I see God's loving care
 for everyone in every land,
 God's children everywhere.
 Wherever I may wander,
 wherever I may be,
 I'm certain of my Maker's love;
 God's care is over me.

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name
 Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven
 Give us this day our daily bread
 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors**

**And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one
For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,
Forever and ever, Amen.**

Hymn #333: "I sing the Almighty Power of God"

We sing the mighty power of God
that made the mountains rise,
that spread the flowing seas abroad
and built the lofty skies.
We sing the wisdom that ordained
the sun to rule the day;
the moon shines full at his command,
and all the stars obey.

I sing the goodness of the Lord
that filled the earth with food;
God formed the creatures with his word
and then pronounced them good.
Lord, how your wonders are displayed,
where'er we turn our eyes,
if we survey the ground I tread
or gaze upon the skies.

There's not a plant or flower below
but makes your glories known,
and clouds arise and tempests blow
by order from thy throne;
while all that borrows life from thee
is ever in your care,
and everywhere that I could be,
thou, God, are present there.

Responsive Reading

Psalms 27:1-6

¹ The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?

² **When evildoers assail me
to eat up my flesh,
my adversaries and foes,**

it is they who stumble and fall.

³ Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war arise against me,
yet I will be confident.

⁴ **One thing have I asked of the Lord,
that will I seek after:
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord
and to inquire in his temple.**

⁵ For he will hide me in his shelter
in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will lift me high upon a rock.

⁶ **And now my head shall be lifted up
above my enemies all around me,
and I will offer in his tent
sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make melody to the Lord.**

Anthem (Music Ministry): "I'll Sing Praise"

Prayer for Illumination

Scripture

Acts 9:1-19

9 But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. ³ Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. ⁴ And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" ⁵ And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶ But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." ⁷ The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. ⁸ Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and

brought him into Damascus. ⁹ And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

¹⁰ Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." ¹¹ And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, ¹² 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." ¹³ But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name." ¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. ¹⁶ For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." ¹⁷ So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁸ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; ¹⁹ and taking food, he was strengthened.

Sermon

Acts chapter 9 teaches us a truth that can be hard to accept: God's mercy does not always feel gentle. Sometimes he blocks the road we have chosen. Sometimes he brings our plans to an end. Sometimes he shows us that what we thought was light was darkness all along.

Yet such an interruption may be one of God's kindest mercies. And Saul's story in Acts Chapter 9 shows us that mercy at work.

Saul leaves Jerusalem convinced that he is serving God. In truth, he is fighting against God's Son. He has authority. He has purpose. He has confidence. But before he reaches Damascus, the risen Jesus meets him. And Christ does more than just redirect Saul's journey. He gives him a new Lord, a new family, and a new life.

This passage warns us that confidence cannot make a wrong road right. Saul was sure of himself and sure that he knew what God wanted, yet he was going the wrong way. We too can be sincere and confident in our understanding of God's Word and still be wrong.

But Christ did not leave Saul on that road. The Good Shepherd pursued his enemy and made him his servant. That same Lord still saves sinners, gathers his church, and turns broken lives toward his glory today.

Acts 9:1–2

9 But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

Luke does not soften the truth about Saul: he is still ‘breathing threats and murder.’ Persecution is not merely one task among many for him; it is the very air he breathes.

Galatians tells us that Saul violently persecuted the church and tried to destroy it. Acts chapter 26 tells us that he believed he ought to oppose the name of Jesus. Think about that. Saul was zealous. He was sincere. He was educated. He was religious. And he was wrong. An active conscience can still be blind. Saul knew the Scriptures, but he did not see Christ in them until Christ opened his understanding. The truth is that we need more than information. We need light from above.

That light met Saul on a long and determined journey. Damascus was about 220 kilometers north-northeast of Jerusalem, and the trip probably took several days, depending on the route.

Damascus was an important trade center with a large Jewish community and several synagogues. Saul carried letters asking for help in finding and arresting believers. But here is the point: grace met Saul before he could carry out his plan. Saul was not looking for Christ. Christ came looking for Saul.

Believers were known as those who belonged to “the Way.” What a fitting name. Christianity is not merely a set of ideas in the mind. It is a life of belonging to Jesus, trusting Jesus, and following Jesus—the one who says, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.”

Saul travels on a real road to attack people of the Way, but Christ turns his whole life in a new direction. This is sovereign grace. God is not rewarding a promising seeker; he is giving life to someone who is spiritually dead and, as Ephesians says, preparing good works for that rescued sinner to walk in.

Acts 9:3–6

³ Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. ⁴ And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” ⁵ And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶ But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.”

Near Damascus, light from heaven suddenly surrounds Saul. Scripture says he fell to the ground.. Then he hears the voice: 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' The repeated name is personal. It is urgent. We hear the same pattern when Jesus says, 'Martha, Martha,' and 'Simon, Simon.' Jesus knows Saul by name. His call exposes Saul's guilt, but it also opens a new future.

Christ's glory reveals Saul's true condition. Later in Acts Paul describes this meeting as an appearance of the risen Lord and the beginning of his commission as a witness. Saul learns that Jesus is alive, reigns, and cannot be defeated.

Saul asks, "Who are you, Lord?" He does not understand everything at once. But Jesus answers, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." Then Jesus tells him to enter the city and wait. Grace does not negotiate with Saul's plans. Christ takes charge. He gives Saul a new direction, a new calling, and a new Lord. That is what conversion involves: turning from self-rule and trusting Jesus as Savior and Lord.

And notice how closely Christ identifies with his people. Jesus does not ask, "Why are you persecuting them?" He asks, "Why are you persecuting me?" To wound Christ's people is to offend Christ. To serve Christ's people is to serve Christ. The church is not sinless. The church is not always wise. But Christ has joined himself in covenant love to the people he bought with his blood.

What comfort this brings suffering Christians worldwide. Christ is not distant from the cost borne in his name; our pain matters because we belong to him. John chapter 10 assures Christ's sheep that they hear his voice and cannot be snatched from his hand. This also corrects those who believe that private faith is all that matters. Romans Chapter 12 says that believers, though many, are one body in Christ and members of one another. We cannot love the Head while treating his body as disposable. Belonging to a local church is an important part of our walk with God. Union with Christ creates patient, practical love for his church.

Acts 9:7–9

⁷The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. ⁸Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.

⁹And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Picture the scene. Saul rises from the ground, but he cannot see. The man who came to seize others must now be led by the hand into Damascus. His companions know that something extraordinary has happened. Acts chapter 9 says they heard the sound and stood speechless. Acts chapter 22 tells us they did not understand the voice speaking to

Saul. They witnessed the event, but the Lord's summons—and its meaning—were for Saul alone.

For three days Saul cannot see, and he neither eats nor drinks. We should not speculate beyond what Scripture tells us. Luke does not say that this blindness caused a lifelong eye disease. Nor does he tell us to treat it merely as a sign or symbol. Even so, the scene gives us a striking picture: the man who thought he could see is forced to face his blindness.

This humbling is severe, but it is not cruel. Saul is brought low so that he may receive mercy. He stands empty-handed. He can neither bargain nor boast. And in the silence, he prays. His fasting does not buy forgiveness. It does not pay for sin. Christ alone made atonement at the cross. Saul waits for what he cannot earn, and the Lord brings him healing.

Some conversions include dramatic outward events like Sauls, and many are quiet. Our assurance does not rest on whether our story resembles Saul's or not. It rests on Christ crucified and risen. It rests on His promise. It rests on the fruit of genuine faith. Paul speaks of his encounter in 1 Corinthians, but he does not congratulate himself. He says, 'By the grace of God I am what I am.' Grace remains at the center. Whether the Lord brings us through a sudden crisis or through years of patient teaching, salvation is his work, and Christ is our confidence.

Acts 9:10–16

¹⁰ Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." ¹¹ And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, ¹² 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." ¹³ But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name." ¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. ¹⁶ For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."

While Saul waits, the Lord calls Ananias, an ordinary disciple in Damascus, to share in the future apostle's welcome and healing. He sends him to Judas's house on Straight Street, a main east-west road, and tells him that Saul has seen a vision in which Ananias restores his sight. Christ is already preparing both men. Then comes the tender word:

‘Behold, he is praying.’ The man who once only breathed threats now breathes prayer. Saul’s prayer does not cause grace; it shows that grace has already taken hold.

Ananias answers honestly. He knows Saul’s evil and why he came. Faith does not pretend danger is harmless. As Ananias approaches the man he fears, each step rests on Christ’s word. Though neither famous nor high-ranking, he goes because the Lord often accomplishes great purposes through ordinary saints who listen and trust, like Stephen, Phillip and now Ananias.

Then the Lord says of Saul, “He is a chosen instrument of mine.” Saul did not appoint himself. Christ chose him to carry the name of Jesus before Gentiles, kings, and the people of Israel. The cruel wolf will become not only a sheep, but a shepherd. And notice how God’s sovereignty and human obedience work together. Christ chooses Saul, and Christ sends Ananias. God’s sovereign grace does not make our service unnecessary. It gives us courage to serve and hope that our service will not be in vain.

Christ also says that Saul must suffer for his name. His suffering will not be accidental or outside God’s rule. His calling will include travel, hardship, rejection, and endurance. We do not share Saul’s apostolic office, but we do share this truth: grace does not promise an easy road. It promises that no suffering is meaningless and no suffering lies outside the Lord’s hand. Our callings differ, but every calling belongs to Jesus. At home, at church, at work, at school, in retirement, in weakness, or in public service—we are his instruments. The question is not whether our task looks impressive. The question is whether we faithfully bear Christ’s name where he has placed us.

Acts 9:17–19

¹⁷ So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” ¹⁸ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; ¹⁹ and taking food, he was strengthened.

Ananias enters, lays his hands on Saul, and begins with two remarkable words: ‘Brother Saul’. The word *brother* can reflect shared Jewish kinship, yet here it also expresses Ananias’s acceptance of Saul into Christian fellowship. Ananias does not deny Saul’s past; the feared persecutor is nevertheless received as family. This one word does not establish the whole doctrine of adoption, but it beautifully illustrates the family welcome that flows from grace. Grace reconciles us to God and teaches former strangers, rivals, and enemies to call one another brother and sister.

Ananias explains that the Jesus who appeared on the road has sent him. Saul regains his sight and is filled with the Holy Spirit. Something like scales falls from his eyes. He rises. He is baptized. He eats. His strength returns. The text does not pause here to answer every question about the order of regeneration and baptism. Instead the emphasis is clear: Christ restores Saul's sight, fills him by the Spirit, identifies him publicly with Jesus in baptism, and receives him into the church. The persecutor joins the people he tried to destroy.

The church still needs the courage of those words, 'Brother Saul.' We must not be naïve about harm; forgiveness does not erase wise care or rightful accountability. Yet the Gospel creates a family that no merely natural bond could create. Philippians Chapter 3 shows Paul surrendering confidence in status and counting all things as loss compared with knowing Christ. In the church, our deepest identity is not our achievement, background, age, class, or former failure. We are those adopted through Christ, receiving one another because he first received us.

Few people have a story exactly like Saul's. But every Christian needs the same mercy.

Ephesians tells us that we were dead in sin. We were walking on the wrong road. We deserved wrath. But God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ. And 2 Corinthians tells us that the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness has shone Gospel light in the face of Jesus Christ. Sinners behold Christ's glory because God first shines the light. God begins salvation. Christ accomplishes salvation. The Spirit applies salvation. Therefore, no sinner is beyond hope, and no believer has any reason to boast.

First Timothy Chapter 1 shows Paul remembering his violence to display Christ's perfect patience for later believers. The worst chapter of your past does not need to be the last chapter of your life. God's grace never leaves us unchanged. Saul's direction, loyalties, community, and vocation come under Christ. Repentance is a Spirit-given turning, and faith rests in Jesus, the only Way to the Father.

For believers who fear that their failures have put them outside mercy, remember what is written in Romans: there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Your peace rests not in the intensity of your conversion memory but in the finished work and living intercession of Christ.

And for those still resisting him, do not mistake delay for safety. The risen Lord has rightful authority over you. Yet the ruling hands were pierced for sinners. Come without excuses and without payment. Confess your sin, abandon self-trust, and receive Christ by faith.

Beloved, behold the grace of Christ on the Damascus road. He stops the rebel, but he does not destroy him. He stands with his suffering church. He humbles the proud in order to heal. He sends an ordinary saint with a word of welcome. He brings a former enemy into a new family and gives him work under a new Lord. Every part of this passage makes Jesus great. Saul is not the hero who found his way home. Christ is the Shepherd who sought him, the Light who exposed him, the Savior who pardoned him, and the King who sent him.

So let the church worship with humility and hope. Let no one boast: grace chose us and rescued us. Let no one despair: Christ saves the ungodly. Let no ordinary saint say, 'I cannot be useful': the Lord used Ananias. Let no suffering believer think Christ has forgotten: he calls the wounds of his people his own. Let every calling be given to the Lord who turns wolves into sheep and servants into shepherds. And as Jesus commands, let us be Salt in a decaying world and Light in its darkness, so that others may see our good works and give glory to our Father in heaven. Let our life together sound like the Gospel—sinners welcomed as family because the Son of God loved us and gave himself for us.

Let us pray,

Sovereign Lord, our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you. We praise you that your grace sought Saul while he was still your enemy, and that the same risen Christ still seeks and saves the lost. Shine your light into every dark corner of our hearts. Break the pride that trusts in itself, quiet the fear that doubts your mercy, and turn our wandering feet into the way of obedience. Make us humble before your Word, tender toward your church, courageous in our witness, and faithful in the callings you have given us. Teach us to count every earthly gain as loss compared with knowing Christ. Keep us from boasting in anything but his cross, and let our lives proclaim that salvation belongs to the Lord. Through Jesus Christ, our Shepherd, Savior, and King. **Amen.**

Adapted from the Prayers of Augustine

Invitation to Offering

Everything we possess comes from the gracious hand of God. In Christ, he has given us a treasure that neither sin nor death can take away. Our offering does not purchase his favour; it is a grateful response to mercy already given. Let us therefore give freely, cheerfully, and in faith, asking the Lord to use these gifts for the proclamation of the gospel, the care of his church, and the good of our neighbours.

Offering Prayer

Offering Hymn #830: “Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow”

Praise God from Whom all blessings flow,
 Praise Him, all creatures here below:
 Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;
 Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Closing Hymn #299: “Holy, Holy, Holy” (V 1,3,4)

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
 Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee.
 Holy, holy, holy! merciful and mighty!
 God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Holy, Holy, Holy! though the darkness hide thee,
 Though our eyes in sinfulness thy glory may not see,
 Only thou art holy; there is none beside thee,
 Perfect in power, in love, and purity.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
 All thy works shall praise thy name, in earth, and sky, and sea;
 Holy, holy, holy! merciful and mighty!
 God in three Persons, blessed Trinity.

Pastoral Prayer

Gracious Father, we come before you through Jesus Christ, trusting not in our worthiness but in his perfect righteousness and finished work. We praise you for seeking sinners, opening blind eyes, and bringing enemies near through the blood of the cross. Build your church in truth and love. Strengthen those who suffer for the name of Christ; guard those who serve in places of danger; give courage to ordinary believers whose obedience may be known only to you.

We pray for those among us who are ill, grieving, lonely, anxious, or exhausted. Grant healing according to your wisdom, comfort through your promises, daily bread for every need, and steadfast faith in every trial. Bring wandering souls home, restore those burdened by guilt, reconcile those divided by sin, and make us ready to receive all whom Christ receives.

Give wisdom and justice to those who govern, peace where there is conflict, protection for the vulnerable, and relief for the poor. Make us salt and light in our homes, workplaces, schools, and community. Keep us humble in prosperity, patient in suffering, and bold in bearing the name of Jesus.

As we soon share food and fellowship, bless the meal before us and those who have prepared it. Give us grateful hearts, joyful conversation, and genuine care for one another. May our table fellowship reflect the welcome of your kingdom and strengthen the bonds of love within your people. We ask all this in the name of Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. **Amen.**

Benediction

May the God of all grace strengthen you, sustain you, and keep you faithful through Jesus Christ. To him be glory forever and ever. **Amen.**