

## Acts 9:1-20 and John 21:1-19

Today Jesus queues up the foundations of our church through the calling of the apostles Peter and Paul...Peter sent to the Jews and Paul to the gentiles...mmm I wonder who was more successful LOL!

Today we have Saul being struck to the ground. Saul the zealous hunter of those false new upstart Christians is struck blind! He will die to being Saul and be transformed and resurrected as Paul. And we have Peter going back to his old life after Jesus' death only to be revisited same as they were when Jesus first came to him...Peter the Fisherman (fishing for people) now to become Peter the Shepherd...caring and feeding for Jesus' flock.

I want to focus on Paul this morning...Paul was both a Pharisee and a Roman citizen...so he had privilege, and he had passion! His sphere of influence was much greater than that of the original 12 disciples who led very sheltered lives as fisherman in the backwater Galilee region of Israel.

Now Jesus throughout the Gospels uses blindness both literally and figuratively to show that whether one can physically see or not didn't matter when it came to being able to actually see God and the ways of the kingdom.

Many times Jesus criticizes his own disciples for being spiritually blind...not seeing the Kingdom of God right there in front of them. They are still many times squarely rooted in the ways of man. Limited by their own physical senses and the blind spots formed by their own prejudices and expectations of how they saw the world and how they thought the world worked which kept them from truly seeing the bigger picture here.

Take us...do we see who we truly are...how is it that so many of us can be so blinded by our own ideas of reality...all illusions...Even Scientifically what we consider to be real and solid is actually 99.95% empty space held together by energy. But we humans like to keep things simple... and many of us never leave the comfort of our own constructs and illusions...comforted in our prejudices and blindness...just look around.

The disciples literally witnessed Jesus' life and even up to the resurrection they had eyes but could not see...so don't beat yourself up too much...it's kinda how we live our lives here. This stuff is hard to get at...but once you begin to see the bigger picture...know that you can't unsee it!

Also naming in the Bible is also very important. Naming in the ancient world was a form of possession (like with your kids)! Saul's name is changed to Paul with God now claiming ownership...now Saul was the first king of Isreal...he had a big ego and Paul actually means the opposite...something little or small. Perhaps Paul needed to not only be physically knocked down but psychologically knocked down as well.

Saul's ego needed some adjustment to become that of a humble and open disciple sent by God to spread the Word to the Gentile's throughout the Mediterranean.

Now in John's account of Jesus when he calls His first disciples, Andrew announces that we have found the Messiah... and Jesus' first words to Simon is... Simon who? I'm calling you Peter...Mr. Rock!

See Peter and Paul didn't find Jesus...Jesus found them! Saul is found by God and pronounced Paul...The naming by God once again shows possession and whose children we truly are.

Through finding His disciples Jesus calls all of them by name to live into their purpose...God's purpose...to be Christ's presence in the world – The living Church! So be careful my friends when Jesus comes a calling you by name...cause He's gonna own you!

Perhaps I can say it this way...Look at the moon...it's nothing more than a cold dark rock spinning in the sky... but when it faces the sun...Wow! It reflects beauty and light into our world and pierces the darkness.

So too, we can reflect the beauty and light of Christ in the world when we turn our face to Him. God is alive and well... in us...not only in our strength, but especially in our weaknesses...for it is at those times when we reflect God and His name for us, rather than our own small pride and ego.

We reflect God's light into the world when we proclaim with our true names that the kingdom of God is right here in front of us all.

Through God's grace we are no longer called sinner... but are named forgiven - we are no longer called unworthy but are called wholly loved... we are no longer named as children of this world... but we are named children of God! You are the Kingdom Come... so I wonder...what's your true name?

A little more about the Apostle Paul...Saul's conversion to Paul was not really a conversion of religion but rather a conversion of perspective... Saul a man zealous for God now being set on the correct path (the word repentance...turn around).

Paul now comes to recognize God reflected in the person of Jesus... the true Messiah...and it literally took the 2x4 of the Holy Spirit to get Saul's attention...the big stick!

See Saul was a persecutor of the early Jesus movement, and he first appears in Acts as the cloak check guy (which stone would you like)...for those who would stone Stephen... the first to die for proclaiming the heresy of Jesus as the Messiah.

Saul saw “the way” as a perversion of Judaism. Remember at this point it was not considered a different religion only a different sect of Judaism. There is no Christianity...Jesus never started a new religion... He was fulfilling an ancient one.

But during this encounter with God, Saul goes from being zealous for the Lord to now being zealous for Jesus as the Lord. His personality didn't change but his focus did. He repented...he turned back to God...now hyper focused on a path that would lead to the birth of the Church and the Christian religion as we know it today.

But Paul never abandoned Judaism...he was a Jewish Pharisee even as he promoted acceptance of the non-Jewish gentiles into this new movement. Paul's letters to the early churches are the oldest documents we have in the Church...they predate the Gospels which were written many decades later.

Now part of our problem with seeing this, is always in how we view God. And no matter what your view of God is... we still have “God contained in a box”...for no matter how hard we try... we are still the created trying to describe the creator...we are inside the frame...while God is outside that frame.

Imagine being in a painting trying to describe the painter. We might believe God is Blue or Red depending on where we are in the painting. We might be able to study the brush strokes or study God's self-portrait – Jesus, to give us a glimpse of the nature and characteristics of God...but in the end we are always still inside the frame trying to describe that which is outside it.

There is a famous Indian fable about six blind men who come across an elephant. And each blind man creates his own version of reality from his limited experience and perspective.

Once upon a time, there lived six blind men in a village. One day the villagers told them, "Hey, there is an elephant in the village today." They had no idea what an elephant was. They decided, "Even though we can't see it, let us go and feel it anyway." All of them went and touched the elephant.

"Hey, the elephant is a pillar," said the man who touched his leg.  
 "Oh, no! it is like a rope," said the second man who touched the tail.  
 "Oh, no! it is like a thick branch of a tree," said a third man who touched the trunk of the elephant.  
 "It is like a big fan" said the fourth man who touched it's ear.  
 "It is like a huge wall," said the fifth man who touched the belly of the beast.  
 "It is like a solid pipe," Said the sixth man who touched the tusk of the elephant.

They began to argue and everyone of them insisted that he was right. A wise man was passing by and he saw this. He stopped and asked, "What's the matter?" See "We cannot agree on what this elephant is." Each one of them told what he thought the elephant was like. The wise man calmly explained to them, "Well all of you are right."

In Diane Butler Bass' book *Grounded* she talks about this idea...we must take care not to be too zealous for the Lord or risk being like Saul and in the process miss the whole point. Remember in the time of Christ people had what can be called a three-tiered view of God or as Diane uses the word elevator God. Richard Rohr also refers to the fact that many Christians today are still pagan worshiping in the style of ancient civilizations.

That is to say...God lives up there! And in many cases we worship Zeus, the old bearded white guy sitting up there on a throne whom we are trying to appease and if we anger God then come the lightning bolts!

With this worldview we live in the middle and you all know what's down there...hot lava...no rocket has yet to find that old man up there...for there is no such thing as up!

It's like night and day...they only exist as a concept on this planet. Out in space you can't find night and day. So always be careful with your view of God...especially when you are passionate about following God's will. Your view and how you imagine God will always be a governor for how you act out your calling in the world.

And that's why religious lone rangers are dangerous. That's why we do everything here in teams and in community...and as I like to say ...don't ever believe that I know any more than you do when it comes to God. My job is to help facilitate your own journeys and relationship with God dictated and perceived through your own perceptions and story and we should always be trying to imagine God greater.

But no matter how good our imaginations are...our ideas of God will always come up short...and many times we really just create God in our own image. I have had many conversations with atheists and when I ask them to describe the God that they don't believe in, nine out of ten times I tell them great cause I don't believe in that God either!

We should never be able to out love or out imagine God. See Paul never changed his passion and heart for God...he believed with all his heart that he was doing God's will... instead he changed how he came to imagine his ideas about God.

And sometimes like Saul, we too can get off track and forget that the scriptures, and the rules, and the rituals are only pointers to God...they are not God...nor will they ever be God...Do we think the Holy Spirit just stopped talking to us 2000 years ago?

The Holy Spirit is still at it today...speaking to all of us in some way...if only we have eyes to see, and ears to hear...I know all of this first hand...See I have been hit by the 2x4 of the Holy Spirit many, many times in my life!

In fact, my Myers Briggs personality type lines up with that of Paul's personality. So repent...turn around...sometimes when God seems farthest away we just need to realize we were looking for God through the wrong end of the telescope!

Your views of God are only limited by your imaginations! So stay humble and keep your eyes and hearts open...you'll start to see things in new ways...look...the kingdom of God is right here...

your faithful servant,  
carmen