

## **“Redirect”**

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### **Scripture:**

#### **Acts 9:1-6, 7-20 (NRSV)**

9 Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. <sup>4</sup> He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” <sup>5</sup> He asked, “Who are you, Lord?” The reply came, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. <sup>6</sup> But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.”

<sup>7</sup> The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

<sup>10</sup> Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” He answered, “Here I am, Lord.” <sup>11</sup> 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, <sup>12</sup> 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.” <sup>13</sup> But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; <sup>14</sup> and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name.” <sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; <sup>16</sup> I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” <sup>17</sup> 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.”<sup>18</sup> And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized,<sup>19</sup> and after taking some food, he regained his strength. For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus,<sup>20</sup> and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.”

### **The Sermon:**

Many of you, here, know that I am a grandma to the cutest toddler ever, Saviah Marie. She comes to church with her parents, and I get to see a lot of her because she lives here in Spokane. She is a very curious, active toddler, which means her parents are tired, pretty much all the time!

When Saviah sees something she wants, she goes toward it, even if that is a fire, or an electrical outlet, or a barking dog.

And then, the adults come along with a variety of ‘NO!’ words.

Saviah’s pediatrician has reminded her parents that it is not appropriate to punish her impulsive and curious actions. Even when she goes after the candle, or the outlet, or climbs the chair, a dozen times.

Rather, the pediatrician has suggested that we “redirect” Saviah. Turn her away from the fire, towards a toy.

Turn her away from the outlet, towards her truck.

Turn her away from the pebbles she wants to stuff in her mouth, to the little toddler golf club her daddy just got her.

Redirect, redirect, redirect.

If ever there was a story of Jesus acting like the parent of a toddler, it is this one today!

But Saul isn’t being redirected from hurting himself, like some curious but innocent toddler...he stood by watching the bloody execution of Stephen by stoning. And he has been traveling, far and wide, to bring other men and women to Jerusalem and to trial; perhaps with the same bloody outcome of death by stoning for all of them. “Breathing threats and murder” indeed!

Yet, he is doing all this terror because he thinks he is right. Saul is a devout Jew, a Pharisee versed in the law and the prophets, and he hates these heretics among the Jewish community. He wants to weed them out.

How to redirect such focused violence?

Well, start by striking him blind. Take this man, full of danger and energy, and strike him blind so he is no longer free to go where he wants, nor can he see to prosecute any others. Beginning as a man on a furious mission, he becomes a helpless invalid and must be guided into the city by his companions.

Even before that though, he is still a man of great religious focus because when the light strikes him, he recognizes something important; this is a manifestation of God in the world. This is not just a weird natural anomaly, it is a theophany. God is presenting Godself to Saul, so he says “Who are you Lord”?

And once he meets Jesus in the light, Saul never turns back.

He fasts from all food, and though the text doesn't say so, he is I bet, deep in prayer and discernment. He is rethinking all that he has done in the name of Yahweh, rethinking all he thought he knew about this Jesus guy, and the people who followed him, the men and women of The Way.

Ananias, a follower of The Way of Jesus, knows enough about Saul to really have his own concerns and spends a little time with God asking if this is really such a good idea.

But the presence of Jesus, in his vision, is compelling enough to send him to Saul and complete the redirect of Saul's entire life.

This entire story, told and retold in Acts, twice more...tells us just how important Saul, now Paul, is to the mission of the people of the early days of the Jesus Way.

And it gives us reason to trust also in the letters of Paul that follow after this book of the Christian Scriptures.

They are letters from this guy, whose life was turned around, by Jesus in a flash of brilliant light, on the road to Damascus in Syria.

Which brings us to us...

I never have had a “Damascus road” conversion. I never could say what day or what hour I accepted Jesus as my personal Savior.

Plenty of people around me in ministry can, and did have a big moment of conversion, of redirection.

I used to feel timid, even inadequate about my vocation because I couldn't drum up a conversion story that was really interesting. I just knew I didn't want to be a nun!

I didn't find Jesus and turn away from a life of drugs and prostitution. I never turned to Jesus because I almost died and that experience changed me.

If you have a vivid and life changing experience, good, even great.  
But no one needs to wait for a Damascus road experience.

Anyone can decide to join the Jesus Way, because Jesus and his model of life, death and resurrection are powerful, meaningful, and life giving.

- You can redirect your life without going blind, but you might just see how life in Christ is a whole new vibrant way of seeing all of life!
- You can redirect your life toward Christ's welcome and love, his compassion and mercy and find that your heart has room to grow in love and welcome, compassion and mercy.
- You may find that life in Jesus is more challenging; maybe even costs you time, energy and money...but the community of people on the Jesus Way are your family and friends, and to them, and with them, you dare to share of all you have.

Maybe, just maybe...as we become followers of The Way, we will experience the peace that came to those early followers.

Maybe we will experience the hope and the joy.

Maybe we will find freedom, like Saul, from hatred and violence and envy and revenge.

The signs of life for the followers of the Jesus Way have always been peace, mercy, bravery, compassion and sharing.

The world needs this, needs the followers of Jesus. Needs the good news of the resurrection gospel.

You don't have to be Paul, who undertook missionary trips to the ends of the Roman Empire to share the story of Jesus.

But somehow, somewhere, each of us has to listen, and decide, when we hear the voice of Jesus speaking to us. In a dream, in a vision, in church, in the hospital, in the recovery program, in our own home, mowing the grass (once heard of this, so I believe it is true). In our own hearts, hearing the rightness of the Jesus Way, and beginning to walk it...and walk it together.

Listen, and if it needs to happen, redirect your life.

Redirect, toward the light that is Christ.

Redirect and find Life.

Redirect, and may you find love and peace, compassion and justice, joy and hope.

In the glory of Easter, say Amen!