



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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April 18, 2010
3rd Sunday of Easter
[Acts 9:1-19a](#)
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Acts 9:1-19a](#)
Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 67](#)
Second Lesson: [Revelation 5:11-14](#)
Gospel Lesson: [John 21:1-14](#)

Who Are You Lord?

The One who confronts sin
The One with the power over physical sight
The One who sends uncertain Christians
The One who gives spiritual sight
The One who does all the work!

Do we teach phone etiquette anymore? As parents, do you sit down with your little kids and teach them how to answer the phone, or have we all just gotten rid of our phone lines at home, so we don't bother to teach them how to answer the phone anymore since we don't have that line at home? We just carry it around in our pocket or clipped to our belts. So do you teach phone etiquette anymore?

I remember being taught by my mom. My dad didn't worry much about phone stuff. She taught me, "When you answer the phone, you have to say 'Hello, this is the Otts.'" And if they ask for someone, then ask who is calling." I kind of wonder about it sometimes because when I call my kids' cell phones usually I'm greeted with a grunt instead of a hello. I think the phone etiquette that they are more concerned about is "How can I ditch all these vowels as I'm texting my friends." I think phone etiquette has kind of changed over time, right?

I don't think anyone had to tell Saul, "Okay, when you are struck blind in the middle of the road on the way to Damascus and someone says to you, 'Saul, Saul,' you have to answer by saying 'Who is it?'" I think that question came naturally for him, but when you stop and think about it, that question shouldn't have been all that natural. Wasn't there a whole list of people he was persecuting, followers of Jesus, followers with some other followers he was also persecuting? It was probably pretty obvious who it was.

Think about this picture for a minute. Saul was a Jew among Jews, a Pharisee among Pharisees. He was taught by the renowned teacher in the day of Gamaliel and he was no doubt one of his prize students. He describes himself pretty much as such later in some of his writings. As far as zeal for the Lord, he was as zealous as they came. He wanted to serve the Lord. He wasn't just some guy that liked inflicting pain on others. He thought this was the best way he could serve the Lord, by trying to drive a wedge between people and what he considered no doubt a religious "nut job," Jesus, who couldn't possibly be the Messiah as far as he was concerned. He wanted to drive a wedge between them so people wouldn't follow him. One of the ways he did it was by persecuting the church.

We are told that he was there giving his approval when Stephen was stoned. We are told he even held the coats so they could wind up and throw the stones even harder. Now he decided that after the stoning of Stephen, the Christians were kind of scattered because of this persecution that broke out against them, so he would branch out. He wanted to go up to Damascus to arrest those who followed Jesus there, the followers of the Way, as Jesus said. He was the Way, the Truth and the Light. He was the only way to come to the Father, and that was probably irksome to Saul.

Yet, there he is, on the road, and a blinding light drives him to his knees. He throws himself on the ground and as he talks to this voice that he can hear (the people around him hear something but they can't understand the words) - think of how it is when you look into a flash and your eyes are blinded by that flash - he's there with his face in the dirt and as he goes to answer it, he inhales and the dust of the ground. It is coming up into his mouth and in his face and into his nostrils. He is talking to this voice with his face buried in the dirt. This voice just flat out confronts him with his sin. "Who are you Lord?" "I'm the One you are persecuting, that's who I am! You think you're serving God when in fact you are working exactly opposite against what God wants you to be doing!" He comes and he lays flat out his sin. He smacks him upside the head with it, doesn't he? "You are persecuting me. You are doing what is wrong. You are sinning. You should be down there in the dirt."

Do you want to play an interesting game? You don't have to get on the road and start walking to Damascus, but just put yourself where Saul is right then and there. You hear your name called out twice and you say, "Who is it?" What is the sin God is going to confront you with? What is he going to say to you? "Why are you (fill in the blank)?" What would he say to our congregation as a collection of Christians? "Why are you (fill in the blank)?"

It's kind of an interesting thought, isn't it? What is it that Satan is trying to use? What sin is he trying to use to drive a wedge between us and our God so that we don't turn away from that sin, we don't turn back to Christ, who lived and died in our place? Instead, we just keep hanging on to that sin because we don't want to let go of it.

Do you think nowadays with the struggles we are having in our area he might say to some of us, "Why are you so focused on the here and now? Don't you know heaven is your home? You like to sing that hymn '*I'm But a Stranger Here, Heaven is My Home.*' Why are you so focused on the here and now? Why are you fighting with your neighbor about things like windmills that are going to be here and gone but heaven is eternal?" Do you think he might be saying that to us? That's kind of an interesting thought, isn't it?

As a congregation, do we say, "It's great that you're so concerned about kids, but why do you act as though 'teach and obey everything I've commanded you' ends when they get confirmed? Why don't you devote that kind of time and energy and resources to all growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?" It's kind of an interesting thought, isn't it?

I suppose when you and I every day of our lives, as Christians, confess our sins to our God, we are kind of answering this question, or at least we should be every day. What is it that Satan is trying to use to separate us from God, and what is it that we need to turn away from and turn back to Christ to find forgiveness? Our God does confront us with our sin. The question is, are we going to listen? Lord willing he isn't going to have to strike us blind for three days or keep us from eating and drinking for three days like what happened with Saul.

Think about that. Saul stands back up when the voice is gone. He lifts his head and starts to peek to look around to see what's going on. He opens his eyes and he sees nothing. All that's left is probably the reminder of that bright flash. His physical sight is gone. Here is the great persecutor of the church that now has to be led by the hand to get the rest of the way to Damascus. Here's a guy that loses his physical sight, but it seems like he is much more concerned about that confrontation over his sin. For three days, he eats and drinks nothing and we are told he spends all that time praying. I don't think he was praying for his sight back. I think he was praying for God's forgiveness because he understood what he had done. His chief goal and his pride was those Christians he might have well been able to separate from Christ who denied Christ and turned away from the truth. Now he was realizing that he was the cause of their damnation. No doubt he was pleading over and over that God would forgive him of his many sins. Which is why he writes, even after he knows he is forgiven, and he still calls himself the chief of sinners, the worst of all sinners, because of what he had done to hurt Christ and attack Christ.

In reality, each one of us could say we are the worst of all sinners. Lord willing, we don't have to go through three days of blindness or some kind of physical thing for God to slap us and get our attention and see that what is really important is the spiritual things. But that's certainly what God did with Paul. He showed him his power, the power of his majesty, and he let him focus on the power of that majestic light for three days where he saw nothing else, I'm sure, in his own head.

Then God says after the three days that he is going to send Ananias to go and be the tool that he uses to give Saul his sight back. But isn't Ananias' reaction interesting when God comes to him and says, "Ananias." "Yes Lord. Here I am. What would you have me do, Lord? I'm ready to serve." "Go to Saul and give him his sight back."

How bad of a person does Saul have to be for someone to say to God, "Are you sure about that Lord? Are you sure you don't want to rethink that?" That's basically what Ananias said. He was pretty uncertain about this whole idea of giving Saul his sight back. He thought it probably was a pretty good deal. "If he can't see us, he can't arrest us." He still knows that is what Saul had come there to do. He's got to live in fear of having his possessions seized or being crated away and thrown into a prison in Jerusalem. He's not real certain about this. He kind of checks with God; "Are you sure this is what you want to do God?"

That's kind of what we are like at times. We've got better ideas for God when he allows difficulty to come into our life. We'd like to tell God how he should rule the heavens and the earth because at times we all think we are smarter than God. But hopefully we get to the point that Ananias did. This uncertain Christian does what God tells him to do. God silences his doubts and his questions with just a simple word, "Go. Don't question me. Go." God's simple command and putting our trust in his promises is what enables us as uncertain Christians to do what we think is impossible. God does it through us.

Three years ago when we built the addition to the school, if people would have stood and said "I'm confident that in three years time we'll have this \$600,000 building all paid off," how many people would have believed that? If I had stood in the pulpit and told you that, you would have asked Paula to get rid of whatever mushrooms I was eating because you would have thought I was nuts.

God tells us at times to serve and to do things and to trust that he will bring about the results and all we at times can do is see the challenges and the obstacles. Quite often those obstacles and those challenges are us, our own doubts, our own uncertainty. We have no promise from God that he would have it paid off in three years and that this is how he would bless us, so there was no way any of us could say that with any certainty. God never said that. But now as you look back, isn't it amazing how God has blessed us, how he worked in spite of us, how he worked through us?

That's what's amazing about our God. He works through people like Ananias. He works through a persecutor of the church, like Saul, who became Paul, the greatest Christian missionary ever, as many have called him. He works in ways that you wouldn't expect. He works through people that are uncertain and hesitant. Lord willing he moves some of you who are sitting here this morning, you kids that are maybe uncertain and hesitant, to go and serve Christ in a life of service as a pastor or as a teacher. God gives us the ability to do what we think we can't do.

You see that in Ananias, don't you? Look at how he greeted Saul. "Brother Saul." Isn't that amazing? This guy who says to God, "Are you sure you want me to talk to him;" he greets him with "Brother Saul." These two guys were as diametrically opposed four days earlier as could be, right? A persecutor of the church; a believer in the Way. Now he calls him "Brother Saul." Do you think Saul kind of thrilled to hear that? A Christian calling him "Brother," a Christian encouraging him. "God has sent me here to heal you because God's got a plan for you Saul."

Think of that. Isn't this encouragement he offers amazing? Think about the opportunities God gives you and me to encourage each other and not focus on what separates us but to focus on what unites us. To not focus on the things that drive a wedge between us but to rejoice in the fact that Christ died for each one of us and that he loved us, so now we can love one another, even if we don't at times like one another.

But we can love one another, because God gives us the ability to do the unthinkable. He gave Ananias spiritual sight before he gave it to Saul, didn't he? He sees that Saul is now his brother in the faith. Then he gives Saul that spiritual sight. He heals him. The scales fall off his eyes. He can see again. I don't know how well, but he can see again. The first thing he didn't do was say "Hey, where's the fridge?" He hadn't eaten or had anything to drink for three days, right? He doesn't say, "Where's the nearest McDonald's? Get me to the Pig." Instead, we are told that immediately he was baptized. Spiritual things became more important to him than anything else. Then after being baptized, after having that spiritual sight restored, then he found something to eat and felt a little better physically. But we see the importance of being right with God spiritually. That trumps all the other stuff of this world.

Think about this for a moment. What role did Saul play in any of his coming to faith? Did he make a decision for Christ? Did he say "You know what? I think it would be a good time now for God to strike me blind and show me what the truth really is." Did he say "Now would be a good time for God to send someone to come and baptize me or get these scales off my eyes" whatever they might have been? He didn't do anything, did he? He simply received God's action. God came and acted. God is the one who did all the work. Ananias really didn't do it. Saul certainly didn't do it. Saul was hellbent for separating Christians from God, right? It wasn't his decision. It wasn't his effort. He didn't do it. God did everything.

When you look at whatever good happens among us, whatever good is done as we serve the Lord, whether it's in the school or in our congregation or in our individual life or in our family life, the good that you see, you and I have to step back and say, "Thank you Lord for doing this among us." Because it's not us. "Not unto us, O Lord, be the glory" it says in Psalm 115. "Not unto us, but to your name be praise."

It's God who has done it in Saul and in Ananias, and it's God who does it in us. For we who love the Lord, let's always keep it clear that he has done the work. We are just the tools in his hands. Then amazed that he loves and has forgiven us, let's try not to act like tools as often as we do. Let's serve him faithfully and love one another.