

“Is Cataract Surgery in Our Future?”

Acts 9:1-18

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In the last few months we have traced Jesus’ life from his birth to his death and resurrection. In considering a text for this week, I wished to find a text that illustrated what happened next after Jesus Easter. I turned to Acts because this book traces the development of the early church. Paul’s conversion is a pivotal event in this history.

When I read this familiar story, it reminded me of the expression “being knocked flat” by some event. The official meaning of that expression is “to amaze or surprise someone.” One morning I was about to leave the house for work. I reached for my car keys that I keep hanging on a hook near our back door. I said to Richard “this is odd, I just saw the keys there a few minutes ago.” Richard said, are you sure? I think the car is running. Then he opened the door and sure enough the car was running. He said, you must have left it running all night. My heart sank and I must have had a look of horror on my face. Then he broke into a grin and said: “not really, Cindy. I started the car to warm it up for you.” We tease each other a lot, but he fooled me this time. My reaction is small peanuts compared to Paul’s conversion experience.

As this famous encounter that Saul has on the road to Damascus unfolds, it is helpful to keep in mind the following descriptive words: **encounter, surrender, ponder, acceptance, get up and go.** As Paul makes his way to Damascus, he is on a vengeful mission. He wants to arrest any Jews who now belong to “the way” and return them to Jerusalem for trial. All of a sudden he is literally knocked flat with a sudden **encounter** with Jesus. “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” So overwhelming is the experience that Saul falls to the ground. Then Saul discovers that he is blind. Now he must **surrender** his self-control and the need to be in charge. And God tells him “you will be told what to do.”

When he arrives in Damascus he neither ate nor drank for three days. It gives him time to **ponder.** This would be a time for reflection and self-examination; in the Bible, references to fasting are associated with spiritual preparation. Think about this event in the following words from a commentary. “Saul begins to see that in proving his commitment to God by persecuting the church, he has actually been proving himself and enemy of God. ...as he accepts the divine perspective on his actions, his whole spiritual world will be turned upside down.”

When Paul meets Ananias, he has come to **accept** a new reality. He was baptized. Now he will now go on to spread the good news. That final step in this process is **to get up and go.**

This story would not be complete without Ananias. He is the unsung hero who plays a significant role in Paul’s conversion. Ananias has an **encounter** with Jesus. Jesus speaks to Ananias in a vision. He is told to go to Saul and lay hands on him so he would see again. Ananias’ response is understandable. He says to Jesus, “You can’t be serious.” Then he goes on to recite Paul’s history of persecution of the followers of Jesus. But the Lord insists; don’t

argue. Go. Ananias **surrenders** to the Lord's command and makes his way to where Paul was staying. Ananais approaches Saul and says Brother Saul, the Master has sent me. What a generous way to approach Saul, especially after what had transpired. This was certainly a demonstration of acceptance on Ananias' part.

Two things happen in rapid succession. Ananais tells Saul that he is going to see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit. No sooner than he touched Saul, that something like scales fell from Saul's eyes and he could see again. Healing as depicted in the book of Acts is synonymous with salvation. Then Saul got up, was baptized and began to eat a meal. Then he went on to become the apostle that is largely credited with the development of the early Christian church.

Now to tackle briefly how the events with Paul apply to us here at Calvary. We are celebrating our 125th anniversary where we enjoy events that highlight our best times throughout Calvary's history. The next step will be to plan for our future. The very actions that we have just discovered, i.e. **encounter, surrender, ponder, acceptance, get up and go** would be good guides for our future decision-making. As we have seen, this process can be difficult. One of the difficulties is resistance. Notice that Ananais started to argue with Jesus when asked to approach Paul. He could not believe his ears. You want me to do what? But Jesus said, do not argue, just go. Jesus had plans for great things from Paul. That was not readily apparent to Ananais based on what he knew. Ananais' impression of Paul was from a very different viewpoint than that of Jesus. That is understandable. All of us see and interpret events from different lenses. It is like a comparison that Pastor Lynell made in a recent sermon. Four people who are standing on different corner of an intersection observe a car accident. Each of them will relate the events differently.

As we move into the years that lie ahead, the quality of our decisions may involve some "cataract surgery." Just as scales fell from Paul's eyes, we may have to look at our own biases and have our lenses cleared. Discerning God's will for us may require some adaptation on our part. In a book called Transforming Congregational Culture, the author sums this up well. "Adaptive challenges are, at their core, spiritual work. They ask of us learning, authenticity, depth, risk and change." If we could see changes as opportunities there are likely to be rich rewards. We have some infallible tools at our disposal. One is the lessons we gain from Scripture. The second is the presence of the Holy Spirit. There are other tools as well, but these stand out based upon our lesson for today. Finally, keep in mind that **encounter, surrender, ponder, acceptance, get up and go** are verbs. They require our actions and a willingness to hear what the Lord may be saying or prodding us to do. Part of our prayers during decision making should include a request for the courage to listen and do.

Let us pray:

God be present to us as we move ahead in our future here at Calvary. Show us what we need to see. Open our eyes to Your reality. Give us the courage to move forward in the directions You desire.