

May 4, 2025

SERMON – Wait, What? Rev. Dr. Kristina Kaiser

When I was in 3rd & 4th grade, my parents had a huge Avon route in Indianapolis. And the details are fuzzy, but I think a **campaign** lasted something like 2 weeks, which meant that every 2 weeks, a bunch of **boxes** would arrive at our house containing all the products that people had ordered, bags to put the products in, and new catalogs that needed to be passed out to everyone on the list. It was a huge undertaking. It usually took my dad an entire day to deliver orders and get those new catalogs in the hands of potential customers, and I was super curious about what those Saturdays looked like for him. So one day I just asked him, “*Dad, can I go with you today?*” And I’ll bet he thought that was going to be a pretty good idea. He probably thought he’d have an **extra runner**, which would lighten the load a bit. And maybe he did. Maybe I was actually helpful to him in some way. But among the memories I have of that day, one that stands out quite a bit is how many times I **tripped**. I tripped over **stairs**. I tripped over **my own two feet**. I tripped **saying goodbye** to people. I tripped so much that I can remember my dad saying, “*Your feet must be growing!*” And maybe that was true, but I think I was just so **eager** and so **excited** to be there, that I **couldn’t keep track of anything**. I was so caught up in the moment of, “*Here I am! Send me! Take me! I want to go! I want to see!*” ...which has a similar tone to where our 2nd Scripture lesson starts today:

SECOND SCRIPTURE READING Acts 9:1–6, 7–19

¹ Meanwhile 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 who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. ³ Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” ⁵ He asked, “Who are you, Lord?” The reply came, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶ But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.”

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

¹⁰ Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” He answered, “Here I am, Lord.” ¹¹ 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, 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 in Jerusalem,¹⁴ and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name.”¹⁵ 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; ¹⁶ I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”¹⁷ 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.”¹⁸ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized,¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

So there was Ananias. The Lord calls, and with all the eagerness he can muster, he said, “Here I am, Lord!”

Well, I wonder...**How many** of us **can relate** to this sense of:

- *Is God calling me? Oh I hope so!*
- *I wonder what it's going to be! I'll bet it's something good.*
- *It's just got to be!*

I've been there so many times myself:

- *How 'bout me? Do you have something for me?*
- *“Here I am!” “Send me!” “Use me!”*

That was Ananias. ...And then he **gets the call**: *I want you to go to Straight Street and lay hands on this man, Saul, praying that he will regain his sight.*”

I can almost hear the, “*Wait, what?*” that must have come from Ananias.

“Wait. What? Saul – the man that’s here to bind anyone and everyone who calls on Your name. You want me to go, get directly next to him, so close that I’m actually touching him...and call on your name. The one who has done unspeakable things to your followers in Jerusalem? That guy?”

You can just **feel the trepidation**. You can feel the, “*Oh no, no, no, no. Please no.*”

Ananias is probably thinking, “*This may be the very last miracle I do!*” I can imagine that Ananias might have been wondering for a moment there, “*God, are you sending me to my death?!*”

But **God persists**.

- *You've really just got this one little part to play, Ananias.*
- *I'm going to do the rest.*
- *Saul is going to turn it around in a big way.*
- *This is a big day, I assure you.*

And, of course, Ananias goes. And, as they say, the rest is history.

But what an **important moment** that, "*Wait, what?*" is.

Let's think about this for a moment in our own contexts. Think of all the **divisions** that exist – ways of **thinking** and ways of **being** that have created these **camps of people**. In the **same way** that I was **tripping** over everything all those years ago when I was so excited to go somewhere with my dad, it's **pretty easy to trip these days**...because everywhere we look, there's a **Saul-esque** moment. As people looking to follow Jesus, we're all **jumping out of the boat**, like *Peter in John, chapter 21*, still trying to wrap our clothes around ourselves.

We're like, "*Yes, Jesus! Yes, my crucified and resurrected, Lord!*"

- *What are we gonna do today?*
- *What are we gonna see today?*

"Send me! Choose me!"

...And this is great! We're all as **adorable** as an eager 3rd grader, I'm sure.

But most of us **don't want to hear where we're going**. And if we think this isn't us, all we have to do is sit down to lunch with ourselves and **listen to our thoughts**:

Yes to neighbors! (But not neighbors who jump out of the bushes and pop up in our windows.)

Yes to education! (But, oh Lord! Could you send one that makes me feel like a successful teacher?!)

Yes to a life partner! (But not the snoring and argumentative kind.)

And this is important because...**Jesus' appearance to the disciples in John 21** has a lot to do with what we call "*advancing the Kingdom of God*," which sounds like something that happens "*somewhere out there*."

But the truth of the matter is: "*Going out into all the world*" **starts with the three feet** of influence around our bodies.

In the end, **all of us** are a **little bit Ananias** and a **little bit Saul**.

We might not be *going to the officials asking for permission to physically bind people who believe differently than we do*. But if we really get to talking about it...**how happy are we with people who are following a path we don't agree with?**

Just looking at myself, I can tell you, I've **had to actually say to myself** recently to **not close myself off** to people that ascribe to **groups I don't support**. And so, thinking about **Saul as an example** for a moment – Saul is an individual saying, *"I know that I know that I know that what I'm doing – how I'm worshiping – what I'm standing for is right. And, conversely, I know that you are not right. And so...you must be persecuted. You must be restrained, jailed, and sentenced to death."* Now, that may sound a bit extreme to our ears, which maybe makes it easy for us to **dismiss** as anything having to do with us: *How am I like Paul?* But if we **check the heart** – is my heart **soft towards you**? Does the Divine in me see the Divine in you? Do I look at you as a child of the living God, same as myself? Am I loving you as my neighbor or am I sitting in disdain against you, viewing you as other, as sinner?

There are moments in my life where I feel it. I **feel the hardness in my own heart** and **body** towards another because of some affiliation that they hold.

And so if I go back to the **Saul as an example**...Saul is knocked off his donkey. He dies this death of sorts, becoming blind.

...an important **correlation**...**Jesus often healed blind people**...and so this passage offers us this **rich metaphor**. *"I once was blind, but now I see."*

Saul experiences this. He has this **resurrection** of sorts. *The scales fall off his eyes.* A **rebirth** occurs, and he lives into a **new way of being** with a **new call**.

And so back to thinking about our **own lives**...there's this little part of us that's a little bit **Ananias**: Sometimes it's the case that we're **eager to serve** at first, only to find ourselves wanting to **hold out** for a better opportunity.

And at the **same time**, we're a **little be Saul**. Sometimes, we're **resolute to a fault** and **need to be reborn**.

The two passages go together inasmuch as the **willingness of our hearts** to *build and advance the Kingdom of God* **requires us to die a million deaths a day** in order for **new life to come**. ...*Because building and advancing the Kingdom of God*...it's **not about forcing others**. It's **not about perfect theology**. It's **not about how much we know and how right we are**.

Building and advancing the Kingdom of God involves a personal and communal commitment to living a life that reflects God's love and values.

That's **the question** we have to ask ourselves: *What does it look like to live a life that reflects God's love and values?*

...Now...**for the disciples**...what we see in **John 21** is a group of **disillusioned, down-hearted individuals**. And when this happens to us – when we feel disillusioned and disheartened, a **basic human tendency** is to **fall back into old ways**.

In their case...*"I'm going fishing."*

"Fine, I'll go with you."

Because, what else is there?!

And if we think about it, we'll find we can **recognize this behavior in ourselves** as well. **Diet and exercise** not working fast enough? Just go back to what you were doing. Because what's the point, right?

If we try to do **something big** – step out of the boat, hoping for good outcomes – and then things don't work out the way we had hoped. The desire that wells up within is to say, *"Well, won't do that again!"* Because what's the point? I put myself out there and for what?

And this **happens to all of us**. The disciples' story is not so far from our own. In their **grief**, they just go out and do something that **feels familiar**. They try to **feel normal**, though it just **creates more frustration**.

Anybody been there? Maybe we go try to clean something because that's something we *can* do. Now the plot really gets good when you then drop something and make an even bigger mess to go along with your original frustrations. That's the best.

But if we **examine the moment**, we see that it just **doesn't work**. Operating **outside of connection with God doesn't make their lives better**. The disciples feel worse – more tired, more helpless. ...until they follow the voice of Jesus again. Just like in **John 10** – they hear the voice of the shepherd. They follow it, and it leads to great blessing...which then leads us to this interaction between Jesus and Peter...so profound. Peter had **denied Jesus 3 times**. Imagine the **pain** of it! He had spoken so boldly: *I will never deny you, even if it means I die with you*.

But here in John 21, Jesus gives Peter the chance to **do just the opposite**. Peter is asked **3 times**, *"Do you love me?"* Then **commit yourself to living a life that reflects God's love and values**. This seemingly strange interaction – and it really is strange to our ears. It doesn't read all that nicely. It's awkward to repeat the words three times over. It creates in us an opportunity to feel the place where the wound lies for Peter and for ourselves. We hear that, feeling hurt, Peter replies, *"Lord, you know that I love you."* But awkward as it is, it's also this **beautiful moment of love**. It's an **example of forgiveness**, of being brought back into community and relationship. Jesus **invites Peter back in**. The **bridge is repaired and made new** between them.

...and it becomes a moment of **rebirth** for Peter. It's a **teachable moment**: One night is not his whole life.

One **thought or many**, one **difficult neighbor or many**, one trying **work relationship**, a season of **disagreement at home**...insert whatever you want here...whatever moment represents your, "Wait, what?" to the Lord calling your name. Jesus sits with Peter, stays **connected**, stays in **relationship**, and offers Peter a new **opportunity to live into God's love and values**.

What does it look like for each one of us here today to live a life that reflects God's love and values? *What rebirth is being offered to us today?*

As we continue on with our service, I offer up these words from the song "*Holy Moment*" by Matt Redman. Feel free to close your eyes if you'd like:

*Lord, with confidence we come before Your Throne of Grace
Not that we deserve to come, but You have paid the way
You are the holy King of all, heaven and earth are in your hands
All of the angels sing Your song - we join them now*

*Come, come, come, let us worship God
With our hands held high and our hearts bowed down
We will run, run, run through Your gates, O God
With a shout of love, with a shout of love*

Prayer

Lord, we lift up the ways in which we are saying, "*Here I am! Choose me!*"

And we also lift up the ways in which we are saying, "*Wait, what?*"

With a hand over our hearts, and with loving compassion towards ourselves we acknowledge, "*This is difficult.*"

At the same time, we recognize your heart to continue bridging divides. What a wonderful thing the Kingdom of God is!

In this moment now, we **receive your love**. And to whatever extent we can, we pray that our hearts would be soft towards those around us and that your love would pour out of us on their behalf. Would your love bring about **revolutionary reciprocity** in our world. In Jesus Name I pray, Amen