

Third Sunday of Easter, New Testament, Year C

RESURRECTION RE-DIRECTIONS

Acts 9:1-6 [7-20]

Third Sunday of Easter

Analysis by Michael Hoy

1Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 2and 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. 3Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" 5He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. 6But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do."

[7The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. 8Saul 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. 9For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. 10Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." He answered, "Here I am, Lord." 11The 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, 12and 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." 13But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; 14and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your

name.” 15But 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; 16I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” 17So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. 18And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, 19and after taking some food, he regained his strength. For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, 20and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.”]

DIAGNOSIS: Heading the Wrong Way

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Breathing Threats

Saul was not on a mission of mercy. On his way to the Way in Damascus, he was “breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord” (v. 1). What’s worse is that he has the blessing of the religious authorities to carry out this act (vv. 1, 14). He was certainly not alone in this mission. He comes with clout. And Ananias of the Way, aware of the reputation of Saul, was hesitant in the fear that threats invoke (v. 13). When threats have the sway and swagger, are we not all breathing them in, and thereby culpable of letting them rule?

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Without Sight

Saul was only seeing clearly what he believed, in his unfaith and the hardness of his heart, was the right thing to do in his sense of mission. He was blind to the terror and persecution he was invoking against God’s own chosen, and the judgment he was heaping on his own head. And soon that blindness would become more physically tangible to him—he was “without sight” (v. 9). Ananias likewise could see Saul’s threat, but would also be

blinded to how much God can do to change the hearts of even the most recalcitrant of people.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Who Are You Lord?

Laying on the ground with vision fading from the brilliance of the light he hears the proclamation of the heavenly voice: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" he asks in trepidation. And the answer he receives at this moment does not bring him comfort, but only enhances the deeper truth of who is he is up against. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." Saul learns that the Way he has been persecuting has a heavenly Advocate that joins them and outranks all of Saul's presumed authority, even religious authority. Even his traveling companions are now "speechless" in the wake of this voice (v. 7).

PROGNOSIS: Headed by the Way's Risen Lord

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): I Am Jesus

Still, this very Jesus would take his place in life and in death with those who are disgraced and give to them the promising Way. Jesus, persecuted unto death, bears with all who have fallen from grace, and yet this will not stop his (and through him our) resurrection that overcomes all death and all of death's legions that have enslaved us. His voice will be the final Word for the Way.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Sight Restored

Scales fall from the eyes of those who before could not see. The Holy Spirit fills us with life and hope and promise that even our lungs breathe freely beyond the air of threats that had so deeply contaminated our atmosphere. Saul becomes "Brother Saul" in the mercies of this One who had appeared to him on the way to the Way (v. 17). He would take his place with the other disciples through the font of baptismal blessing that gifts his

life and at the table that nourishes his strength.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Proclaiming the Faith

Now there is something new to breathe upon the world. Saul goes out proclaiming the very One whom he had once persecuted, "He is the Son of God." "He is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel" (v. 15). And as such, Saul (and we with him) are emboldened to declare the promise with courage even when bound and suffering (v. 16). Which could even mean that we are "bound to Jerusalem" (v. 2), to the very authorities who also need to hear the promise that a new place and good news is given to all the captives of this world, so that all may be free in the mercy mission of Jesus the Christ.