

Who Are You, Lord?

Acts 9:1-6

First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

May 4, 2025

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The description isn't long, but we can picture Saul, can't we? All it takes is that one line, "Meanwhile, Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples..." (Acts 9:1, NRSVUE).

That one line feels like it tells us all we need to know...perhaps it tells us more than we need to know, or at least more than we want to know.

After all, our headlines have contained too many stories about people who are on the other end of that kind of energy; people going about their daily lives working and playing and doing what they understand to be right; people who have come up against a force like Saul. And we certainly don't want to envision ourselves as those people. We don't want to envision the Sauls of our world.

So, who is Saul, anyway? If you have spent much time with the book of Acts you will recognize him even though Saul is not the name we usually hear used. Rather we usually refer to him as Paul. In Acts 13:9 Luke writes, "But Saul, also known as Paul..."

See, contrary to our experiences in other places in the Bible, this is not a name change. This is not a shift that happens because of a significant experience or a new assignment. This is not a story where Saul, breathing threats, hears a voice and loses his sight only to have his sight returned as he is given a new name.

Rather, the same character has two names. Saul is his Jewish name. It is the name he uses among the Hebrew people, within his community. But Saul is also a citizen of Rome. And Paul is his Latin name. It is the name he uses in the Roman empire. So, rather than a name change, Saul always had two names and we see them both used in scripture - Saul when he is closer to home and among his people, then Paul as he goes out into the larger world and as he comes in contact with Gentiles out in the Roman Empire. And especially because so many books of the New Testament are letters that are attributed to him, we are much more used to hearing him called Paul.

For today's story, Saul is the name he is using.

And Saul is not happy. He is not happy to see the way that people are being drawn to the Jesus movement. Unfortunately, he can only see that as competition. He is not happy to hear the ways that people are blaming his people for what happened to Jesus. Like many of us, he can't help but get defensive when Jesus' followers are telling the story. And Saul, he feels big feelings and has big energy, and so he goes to the authorities and gets permission to arrest anyone who is speaking on behalf of Jesus.

That is the mission he is on when our story begins. But as he goes, he is stopped in his tracks. A flash of light, a voice calling out, a question he cannot turn away from.

And from these experiences not only does he lose his sight for several days, not only does he - who had made his own way - have to be led by the hand, but he in turn asks a question.

“Who are you, Lord?” Saul asks.

And isn't that the question at the heart of our faith? Who are you, Lord?

That question is central to who we are and who we become as Jesus' followers. It has to be. How can we follow one we don't know? How can we imitate one we can't see?

So, who is Jesus?

I'm curious, what would your answer be to that question? (listen)

We can talk about him in so many ways. We can talk about him from a historical perspective - time and place and culture, family members, faith. We often talk about people this way.

Who am I? I am a 51-year-old white woman from Iowa. I have lived elsewhere, but always around the Midwest. I am married with two children and two stepchildren and six grandkids. I am a Christian. I am a pastor.

We have these conversations all the time, right? And in some ways those details are important. They give us a place to start. They give us a window in. But they don't tell the whole story.

Beyond basic demographics, there is so much more to who each of us is and it is no different with Jesus.

So, who is Jesus?

He was a Jewish man. But why does that matter? It matters because his Jewish faith rooted him in love of God and love of neighbor.

He lived in the Roman Empire, in a time and place where there was a delicate balance of power and where the religious authorities were trying to stay on Rome's good side so that they could have some semblance of freedom and autonomy. But why does that matter? It matters because it helps explain some of the pressure and tension. It helps explain why the authorities aren't always fans of Jesus' especially when he was pushing a little too hard and when they feared the balance becoming...out of balance. But even beyond this, who is Jesus?

Jesus is one who sides with the oppressed, with the poor, with the hurting, with the left out.

Jesus is one who brings wholeness, who offers forgiveness, who sees through a heart of love.

Jesus is one who stands firm in his commitments, who risks his own life for others.

Jesus is one who speaks honestly, who offers second chances, who draws people in.

Jesus is one whose commitment grows from his connection to God and who lives his life in connection to other people.

Jesus is one who reminds us that everything we do comes down to loving God and loving other people.

Who is Jesus?

The question matters. It mattered for Saul as he discovered what was at the heart of Jesus and what it meant to follow him...it mattered so much that it changed Saul from the inside out.

The question matters. If we kept reading in Acts - and I encourage you to do so - we would find that it mattered for Ananias. Ananias, a person who also heard from Jesus, who was asked to go to Saul, a known enemy, and to heal him. It mattered to Ananias because had he not known the heart of Jesus, he certainly would have said no to this assignment.

The question matters. It matters to us. If we are to claim to be followers of Jesus, then we, too, must ask, must wonder, must seek, must learn. We must come to know who Jesus is and then we must work to live like him.

And in this process we must be honest in our asking and in our answering as we wonder: "What voices do we need to hear the voice of Christ today? What voices have been silenced in our certainty? What stories have been ignored in an age of shouting and anger? Do we know the Lord we seek to follow, the one whose name we take and whose path we follow? 'Who are you, Lord?' is a question we need to ask as fervently as did the blinded, frightened Saul lying on the side of the road to Damascus"

[\(Discipleship Ministries | Third Sunday of Easter, Year C - Preaching...\)](#).

Who are you, Lord? Let us ask. Let us listen. And when we hear, let us live in ways that shape our lives like his. Amen.