

3RD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

APRIL 14, 2013

RECAST YOUR NET

Pastor Jim Dunn

Acts 9:1-22

The Conversion of Saul

9 But 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 belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. **3** Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. **4** And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" **5** And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. **6** But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." **7** The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. **8** Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. **9** And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

10 Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." **11** And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, 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 at Jerusalem. **14** And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name." **15** But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. **16** For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." **17** So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him

he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came 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 he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; **19** and taking food, he was strengthened.

Saul Proclaims Jesus in Synagogues

For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. **20** And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." **21** And all who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?" **22** But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

"And all who heard him were amazed and said, 'Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name?'" Acts 9:21

In 1971, COL David Hackworth of the US Army amazed the public. For over twenty years he'd served in the Army. Became one of the most decorated service members in US history, earning eight Purple Hearts and ten Silver Stars. He'd earned a battlefield commission during the Korean Conflict. Commanded a battalion in Vietnam. And in 1969 commanded an infantry regiment in Vietnam. In 1970 he served as the senior military advisor to the Army of South Vietnam, whose officers he believed were essentially corrupt. Promoted to full bird colonel in 1971 and selected for the War College, he was being groomed for general. But in 1971 he made what he himself called later an about face. Growing disillusioned with the US war effort in Vietnam, he gave a television interview. On June 27, 1971 he appeared on the program *Issues and Answers* and strongly criticized US commanders in Vietnam, said the war could not be won and called for US withdrawal. The interview enraged senior US Army officers at the Pentagon. Hackworth soon found himself in danger of being court-martialed, of losing everything he had worked for.

As dramatic as that sounds, it can't top Paul's about face. Paul went from making havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon the name of Jesus to proclaiming the name of Jesus in the city of Damascus. A total reversal! And, as he himself said, as a result, he lost everything. To the Philippians he wrote: "I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things." All of his previous credentials, "a Hebrew of Hebrews, in regards to the law a Pharisee, as for legalistic righteousness, faultless," he writes, all of it lost. He traded his credentials, his prestige, his wealth, his signs of success for beatings, imprisonments, and eventual execution. He knew that the very things he'd been doing to Christians would now be done to him!

So, Paul's about face, his reversal, was immediate -- despite all that loss, Paul was persecuting Christians one day and preaching Christ the very next?

Well, I don't know about you, but the account of Paul's conversion is so familiar, maybe I don't pay as close attention to the details as I should. We may overlook one particular detail that says Paul's reversal was not so different from our own reversals, setbacks, losses, breakdowns, letdowns, and disappointments.

And what about that one particular detail? "And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank." Paul didn't eat or drink anything for three days after Jesus appeared to him and confronted him. Because that's what reversals and losses do to people. He didn't eat or drink anything for three days. He may have been in shock, disoriented, confused, grieving. One moment he had been so certain of where he was going. The next moment he's stopped in his tracks. To now make a total about face, to now turn around and follow Jesus meant not only the loss of everything he knew, the loss of everything he had. It meant he was guilty of having arrested and murdered followers of Jesus.

That would cause anyone to lose his appetite. You know that feeling. It comes with a serious change in your health, like Paul's sudden loss of sight. It comes with the loss of your job or career, as in Paul's case. It comes with a sudden reversal of your finances, as happened to Paul.

The result of a reversal, a setback, a loss is loss of appetite, or shock, or the feeling of being disoriented, confused. Or grief. All of which come with being stopped in your tracks, like Paul. It feels like being stopped in your tracks. At Arlington Cemetery, where COL David Hackworth is also now buried, there is the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. There, a soldier keeps guard in front of the tomb. The guard is never stopped in his tracks. Even in the worst of weather, the appointed guard has kept his steady pace back and forth in front of the tomb 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, since 1948. Not even by hurricane has the appointed guard been stopped in his tracks.

But Paul was stopped, going nowhere those three days. You know that feeling. But while Paul was stopped, someone else was on the move.

- Who is always on the move, leading His people with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night
- Who told David: "Are you to build Me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as My dwelling." (2Samuel 7)

The Lord is always on the move, going with His people to Babylon as they went into exile. Blowing wherever He pleases, just like the wind. Walking the dusty roads of Judea and Galilee as He led His disciples. As He said, "I must keep going today and tomorrow and on the third day I will reach My goal." (Luke 13:33)

His goal being to reverse all of life's bad reversals – to reverse death – and bring forth life that cannot die! His goal, to begin that reversal even now with new life rising out of loss. As through Baptism we are joined to His death and resurrection.

The Lord is always on the move, giving Paul a resurrection appearance. Giving Paul a vision of Ananias. Giving Ananias a vision that he needed to go and speak to Paul. The Lord is always on the move, maneuvering Ananias into Paul's life to baptize him, that with new life Paul could go in a new direction. As He maneuvers the Ananiases in your life in your times of setback and loss, shock and grief. Providing persons in your life to encourage you, to encourage your faith, to bring forth in you new life, moving you in a new direction.

Enabling you to recast your net. To start over.

For the disciples, that looked like a resurrection appearance of Jesus enabling them to simply recast their net. For Paul, recasting his net looked like being joined to Jesus' death and resurrection in Baptism enabling the death of his old life, the leaving behind of his dragnet and enabling his new life of being a fisher of men. For Israel, recasting their net looked like the Lord moving with them into exile, enabling them to start over in Babylon, not merely putting life on hold until their return to the Promised Land, but starting in Babylon a new life. "Build houses and settle down," the Lord told them. "Plant gardens and eat what they produce. Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile." (Jeremiah 29:5,7)

For you, recasting your net looks like the Lord granting you new life through the daily renewal of your Baptism, enabling you to grow new hair, or to seek a new job, or to turn the page to a new chapter.

By the same power which Jesus reversed death, by which He made death do an about face!!

Amen!