

WHO ARE YOU LORD?
Acts 9:1-6

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¹ Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. ³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" ⁵ "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. ⁶ "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

Dear friends in Christ,

"Who are you Lord?" It's not just a murderous Pharisee that asked this question. You and I have asked it too. Being instructed through confirmation whether as a teen or an adult and about to take the Lord's Supper for the first time, we asked, "Who are you Lord?" Sitting in the pastor's premarital counseling class, the pastor's questions might well have led you to ask it. As a sinners overwhelmed by the brokenness and loss in our lives, we must also ask, who are you Lord? This is a question, which we ask ourselves every single day, a question for which we need an answer. WHO ARE YOU, LORD?

1

(1-5) ¹ Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. ³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" ⁵ "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.

Paul had a long way to go before the Lord appeared to him on the road to Damascus. Paul himself tells us. (Phil 3:4-6) "If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless." A Pharisee was a very religious person. To put in today's terms, a Pharisee was concerned, not only with getting to church service on time, but even early enough to have his children quieted and the hymnal opened and marked. And that is fine, but the result is that they believed they were better than other people who did this. A Pharisee didn't need a Savior, because he was good on his own.

Paul was a Pharisee of Pharisees. That made him the most self-righteous of the self-righteous. It wasn't enough for him to watch as people like Stephen were put to death, he had to persecute them, too. And it wasn't enough to persecute Christian in Jerusalem, he had to go to Damascus too. His religious zeal led him to kill and work directly against Christ. This is the man who Jesus called to repentance, a man who asked, "Who are you Lord?"

Is this a Savior you need? It's easy for long time Christians to see the sins of abortionists and atheists and those who don't attend worship. We can probably quote the Bible passages and even know all the things that need to be said to call such a sinner to repentance. But is this the Savior you need? What about the people who don't have marital troubles? Or the teen that has never been impure or used alcohol? What about the person who not only attends church, but also Bible Class, and who offers generous gifts of time and money? Are you asking, "Who are you Lord?"

One of the wisest and most learned men I have ever known was a now deceased Seminary professor. Dr. Becker told us that one time he was serving a congregation in Iowa where the congregation didn't pay him very well. And then he got another call to a congregation which would have paid him a 20% increase about \$600 dollars more per year. He hemmed and hawed about the call, knowing in his heart that he needed to stay where he was, but tempted nonetheless. He finally returned the call and comforted himself with the knowledge that he wasn't in this for the money. The following Sunday, the president of the congregation came to the altar after the service and announced that they knew he had turned down a higher paying call for their sake and gathered a special collection they had taken up. He thanked the man but didn't open it until he got home where he found \$600. It was then, he said, that he realized how self-righteous he had come to feel over turning back that call. He said that gift gave him a reminder that he needed to repent of his self-righteousness.

Whether you have been a Christian for many years, or whether this is the first time you have ever set foot inside a church, Jesus is for you. You and I come here not with hash marks of service on our sleeve, or a spiritual resume that boasts of our great deeds for the Lord, but as sinners, one and all. You and I come here every single Sunday with the same exact question: "Who are you Lord?" He is a Lord who calls sinners to repentance, exactly the kind of Lord we need.

2

Saul believed and came to know that it was faith in what Jesus had done, not at all on what he had done, that saved him. But Jesus wasn't done with Saul! (4-6) *He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."*

Jesus also drafted Saul to work for him. After he was properly instructed, Paul began to serve the Lord. Jesus is a Lord who calls sinners to serve him.

That's what our gospel lesson is about for this morning. Peter understood that his morning was not about the number of fish he caught. Those fish showed him the answer to the question, "Who are you Lord?" He saw the answer and began to serve Jesus. He did what Jesus asked him to do.

There are volumes of books written today about service in the church. You can find books that tell you how to get people to serve better and more. You can find books that teach how to motivate to get the work of the church done. We can make plans for how we are going to get more and more of our members to use their gifts in service to the Lord. But as much as they may have good ideas or a good plan, none of that is really of any value until you and I ask that simple question, "Who are you Lord?"

If your answer is, "because the church needs it," or "if it is convenient for my schedule," or "I suppose I need to do my part," then any service that is rendered will not only be unsatisfactory, it will be wrong. If your answer is, "He is my life. I was dead but now I am alive. I did not choose him in any way; he chose me purely out of his love. He took me, the damned sinner that I am, washed me in his blood and gave me eternal life. I was lost, but now I'm found – because he rescued me." For a Lord like that, what is too much? What is too inconvenient?

We probably weren't on the road to Damascus. It was probably at a baptismal font, or sitting in a pew, or perhaps at the kitchen table of someone who really loved us, but you and I all have asked this question. Eventually everyone will need to answer it. Blessings to Jesus for loving us enough that we should be allowed to ask: "Who are you, Lord?" Amen.