

Acts 9:1-9      Falling Scales  
May 1, 2022

There are several compelling scenes that follow the Easter story about the empty tomb; the story of the disciples on the Road to Emmaus, Mary mistaking Jesus for the gardener, the appearance of Jesus on the shore of the Sea of Galilee fixing breakfast after the unsuccessful night of fishing and the restoration of Peter, Doubting Thomas.

The reading from the Acts of the Apostles describes the conversion of Saul on the Damascus Road, which is not normally associated with Easter. Though we assume some time had passed since the Easter events, what we read about in this text, is an appearance of the risen Christ.

In First Corinthians Saul, also called Paul, writes, “. . . that he appeared to Cephas (Peter), and then to the twelve. After that, he appeared to more than 500 of the brothers and sisters at the same time . . . then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me, as to one abnormally born.”  
1 Cor. 15:8

Saul was very serious about his faith, and it led him to the conclusion that the followers of Jesus were a threat, so he had come to work against them. On his way to Damascus, after hearing that faith in Jesus had spread there, he experienced a mysterious and miraculous event. He saw a blinding light and heard a voice with whom he had a brief conversation. Jesus

told Saul that his efforts were misguided. Then after three days of fasting and blindness, his sight was restored and the gospel story had taken a turn.

There is more here than meets the eye. The description in Acts treats it with a bluntness that gives little place to its subtleties, as if Saul had no history, and as if afterwards there was no growth, no sense of depth. These subtleties are important.

Aside from the dramatic nature of it, there is not anything all that uncommon about it. Saul was on life's journey with a task to perform that he believed was right. Then, suddenly, his experience changed his mind, and the course of his life.

There are different ways it can happen. A person could be wandering along aimlessly in life and then find a purpose and a direction. Or someone might, unlike Saul, not have a high regard for religious things such as Grace and Faith, Justice and Mercy, but otherwise believe just as strongly that they were on the right path and doing the right things, only to collide with the realization that they were accomplishing more harm than they thought, and not as much good.

It is possible that certain features of one's path in life could remain unchanged; there is no change of vocation, or job, or even address, but life takes on a new meaning because there has been an encounter with the risen Christ.

Much of what the New Testament stories are about are the accounts of, and then the aftermath of, similar encounters, like those which have been happening mostly in less dramatic ways than Saul's experience was, and with less encompassing results, given that Saul would be such an integral person in the history of Christian origins, writing a significant part of what later became the New Testament and spreading the gospel throughout the Mediterranean world and into Europe. But taken together, results of the billions of believers that have come and gone since are also very wide-ranging.

It bears acknowledging that much of Christian history is littered with failures, but even so, something rises above the failures. The light of resurrection rises above. From time-to-time, for those who have these experiences, the scales fall off and clarity ensues, even if only if fits and starts.

We sometimes look in the wrong places for meaning; in the realm of human politics, but it is not to be found there. We seek it in the everyday occurrences of life; educational experiences, work-a-day routines, bureaucracies even, even church, but these are all muddled up by the human beings who are not capable of the kind of vision or moral fiber that is required. We seek it in our personal lives, and there is often cloudiness and chaos there too. The inner life can sometimes be the last place the ambiguity of things fades.

But on the Damascus Road it is found, and the cloudiness fades away like a mist in sunshine. We find a new and different reality playing out alongside everything else that happens. The realm of God impinges on the material world, and when seen, it hallows and heals, and gives understanding and direction.

So two things are true at once:

The world's messiness, which is plain, we can see it with the scales on our eyes, including our part in it; and the eternal realm of the divine, which cleanses and heals.

Once the scales fall away, they can both be seen side-by-side; the messy world of people alongside the eternal realm of justice and mercy and goodness accompanying people everywhere, shaping their character, guiding their thoughts and actions, leading to heaven.

We are like the disciples on the Road to Emmaus who, after the journey with the stranger, in the breaking of bread, they recognized him as he disappeared, the scales come off. Or like Mary, trying to convince the gardener that if he will just tell her where he has put the body, she will take care of it. Then he says her name and the scales come off.

Or Peter on the Sea of Galilee after the unsuccessful night of fishing, when the stranger on the shore told them to let their nets down on the other side of the

boat, and there was too much to take in, the scales came off. “It is the Lord.” There is always someone like Thomas who has to touch the wounds in order for sight to become understanding. “My Lord and my God.” The scales came off.

Let us pray that they might also fall:

from our eyes  
from the eyes of our neighbors and friends  
and from the eyes of our enemies too, for God’s sake,  
and the sake of the world.

Now and forever, amen.

[Back](#)

[Home](#)