

Reflections from a United Methodist Pastor

September 6, 2020

Lesson 1

Seeing Jesus

Acts 9:1-20

By F. Belton Joyner

Sometimes when Christian believers read these verses, they feel guilty if they cannot name “the time and place when I was converted.” Paul’s experience is hardly the standard measuring stick for how God’s grace reaches people. How dare we think God has only one tool at God’s disposal!

Timothy grew and was nurtured into the faith (2 Timothy 1:5). Lydia came to believe at a women’s prayer meeting (Acts 16:13-14). Onesimus came into trust in God through a relationship that developed in prison (Philemon 10). The Ethiopian eunuch came to know Jesus through Bible study (Acts 8:26-40). No wonder the author of 2 Peter begins that letter with an acknowledgment that others have faith “equal to” (Common English Bible), “as precious as” (New Revised Standard Version), his own (2 Peter 1:1). The depth of faith is not measured by the drama by which that gift is given.

Paul’s faith journey was not lived in isolation. Ananias helped Paul by explaining what had happened (Acts 9:17). Paul stayed for several days with the disciples in Damascus (verse 19). Paul had Barnabas go to bat for him (verse 27). Paul continued to share the journey with other disciples (verse 28). It wasn’t long until Paul was teaming up with Barnabas to go on missionary work (Acts 13:2-3). Together.

With our cultural value of individualism and “pull yourself up by your own boot straps,” we may be tempted to try to live out the faith expedition on our own. To do so falls short of God’s gift of community. The Common English Bible translation gives a warmth to the reality of community when it refers to those believers as “family” (Acts 9:30). “The family of believers” helped Saul when his life was under threat.

Our lives may not be under the same kind of death peril that faced the apostle, but each of us travels with some risk or hazard. It may be a temptation. It may be a broken relationship. It may be a failure of confidence. It may be blindness to human need. It may be a love of money. It

may be—well, you know what your “threat” might be. We need one another if we are to live faithfully with the Jesus who claims us. Conversion leads to community.

Prayer: As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Who are You, Lord?”

F. Belton Joyner is a retired elder in the North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church. He has served in a variety of local church and connectional responsibilities. His publications range from church school curriculum to theology popularization to mystery novels. He has written these weekly thoughts on the lessons in Adult Bible Studies for his conference newsletter since December 2001. They are printed here with permission.