
Youth Sunday Sermon by Natalie Spangler

A sermon by Natalie Spangler
Easter 3 – Year C

Good morning! My name is Natalie Spangler, and I am currently a senior at Atlanta Classical Academy. I have attended St. Philip's my whole life, meaning that I was baptized, received my first communion, and was confirmed here. This also means that as a 6-year-old I colored during sermons, when I was 13 I painstakingly tried to listen to them, and then at about 16 things started to finally click. I am so excited for the opportunity to get to give this sermon with Avery Culp and to give back to the church in this small way. In the first lesson, Acts 9:1-6, Saul, who actively impeded the spread of Christianity, comes to believe in Christ and proclaims the name of the Lord. This is a pretty incredible, drastic change, and it is one made in about three days. Saul is able to transform himself in this way because he was harrowed.

This word, harrowed, is not very common, and I have only seen it used once, in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. I had to spell this word for my dad when I was writing this, and I think it would be helpful to spell it now: H-A-R-R-O-W. Harrowing is the violent disturbance of the soul by a moment of wonder and fear that prepares an individual to be directed towards truth. The process of harrowing reveals what is required before an individual is educated.

The harrowing in this story takes place when Jesus first speaks to Saul. The flash of light from Heaven and hearing the voice of Christ instill fear and inspire wonder in him; these two encounters disturb Saul's soul, and Jesus compels Saul to reflect on his beliefs by blinding him. Now, this is my favorite part of the story, because I think it reveals what is required for Saul to be educated, really for anyone to be. "For three days he was without sight": for three days, Saul was completely vulnerable. Without his sight, anyone could prey on him or he could accidentally put himself in tremendous harm. Not only did Saul's blindness make him vulnerable, it also humbled him. Naturally, he became reliant on others for security, directions, etc; his inability to act independently forced him into humility.

The vulnerability and humility created by Saul's experience with harrowing prepared him to be directed towards the truth of Christianity by Jesus through Ananias. Once Ananias lays his hands on Saul and speaks truth into him, Saul's sight is restored, and, "he got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength." Saul chose Jesus, he chose Christianity, the VERY thing he was working to eradicate earlier in the story.

Now, how does this affect us? Well, as Jesus told Ananias, "for [Saul] is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel." I think that this story shows that, in our journey to be better Christians, we must be both vulnerable and humble. A flash of lightning from Heaven and being directly addressed by Jesus are not the only things that can harrow us. The word of the Lord, the beauty of our church services, and the relationships we form with other members of the congregation can all inspire fear and wonder in us. As Christians, we need to be constantly harrowed in order to be constantly realigned towards the truth and goodness of Christ. I hope that we all experience a moment of harrowing today, and that we are all made better because of it. Thank you!