

First Reading: Acts 9:1-6 [7-20]

May 4, 2025

¹ 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 who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. ³ Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" ⁵ He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶ But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." [⁷ The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. ⁸ Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. ⁹ For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

¹⁰ Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." He answered, "Here I am, Lord." ¹¹ The Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment 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 in Jerusalem; ¹⁴ and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name." ¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; ¹⁶ I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." ¹⁷ So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, 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 his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, ¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, ²⁰ and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God."]

Queen Anne Lutheran Church has an interesting history. Back in 1918 when Pastor Jesse Pflueger founded it, one of the first confirmation students he had was a teenage boy who loved stories, ancient legends from the long distant past. This gave the Bible a special appeal. Each Wednesday he would stay after class and ask Pastor Pflueger

questions on topics ranging from the mines of King Solomon to the Holy Grail of Jesus Christ. He wanted to know everything. His appetite for learning was insatiable.

One day, as they were nearing the completion of the confirmation process, Pastor Pfleuger took the teenage boy aside. He was tall for his age – probably 5’8” or 5’9” – and strikingly handsome. Several of the girls in class had taken an interest in him, but Pastor Pfleuger could see in him the earnestness of a young scholar. “Have you considered studying something like archeology in college?” he asked. The young man nodded. That was his dream. The Great War had ended, and the world was wide.

Several years later, Pastor Pfleuger – who had from time to time himself contemplated the possibility of teaching college – was delighted to learn that our confirmation student had been accepted to study archeology at the University of Chicago. They exchanged letters during that time, the last of which contained still more good news. The young man, having finished his degree in archeology, had been accepted to the Sorbonne in Paris where he intended to complete his PhD in the same field and specialize in the study of ancient artifacts.

Then the world changed. The Great Depression settled like a heavy cloud over the United States as banks closed and millions found themselves unemployed. Hitler rose to power in Germany, trailing Mussolini in Italy by only a few years. The teenage boy Pastor Pfleuger knew back in the early 1920s had changed too. Now as a man, he traveled across the world as an archeologist searching for the artifacts he had been reading about since his adolescent years in Queen Anne. Students and colleagues invariably referred to him by his title: Dr. Jones...Dr. *Indiana* Jones.

* * *

Several years passed. Tension and conflict overtook most of Europe, North Africa, and Asia. The world had so recently emerged out of the Great War, Pastor Pfleuger often thought to himself. How could the possibility of another appear on the horizon so quickly? He wondered, too, about Indiana (or Indy, as he called him). The letters came less frequently now, dripping like water out of a faucet only to stop entirely. An article appeared in the *Times* which Pastor Pfleuger read daily: “American Archeologist Indiana Jones Disappears in Cairo: Police Suspect Murder.” His heart sank.

Then one day, it must have been late in 1937, Pastor Pfleuger – now a professor at Pacific Lutheran College – received a letter. It had no return address. He opened it carefully, wondering who the sender might be. It was Indy. Reports of his death had been greatly exaggerated. He was alive. Thanks be to God! The news, however, was not all good. Indy had acquired three ancient artifacts worth more than the proverbial price of gold: an indescribably special chalice, a rectangular box the size of a coffin, and a mysterious set of plans for a time machine he stole from Nazis he encountered in the ancient city of Tanis. The U.S. Government, however, had taken them from him for reasons, they said, of safety.

Indy had other plans. He knew a person on the inside, someone who could identify the location of the chalice, the box, and the set of plans. The government was storing them in a warehouse. Together, he and his friend determined a way to get them back. Only one problem remained: they needed a place to store the items for safekeeping. The question was where. Perhaps his former pastor would know.

What a strange request, Professor Pfleuger thought to himself as he finished reading the letter. How should I know where to hide these artifacts? he asked. Then it came to him. "Of course, I know exactly the place," he said, "Queen Anne Lutheran Church. Only it must be done with great discretion. Nobody can know. He paused, unsure of how to proceed.

"Aha!" he finally exclaimed. I will have these items shipped to the church and will inform the pastor serving there that only he can know what they are and where they are in the building. When that pastor's tenure at Queen Anne Lutheran ends, he will inform the next pastor and he, the next. No other person can or will know, lest unwanted attention be drawn to the church. This will be a secret shared only by its pastors. Only they will be in on it."

It took several months for the items to be delivered. The pastor who received them told no one. As a favor to Pfleuger, he hid them. When the pastor's time at the church ended, he would inform the next pastor. The instructions were invariably the same: tell nobody except your successor and instruct him to go and do likewise. The plan worked. To this day, even Rich Mathes, Chair of Facilities at Queen Anne Lutheran, knows nothing about the items, much less their location.

* * *

But today that changes. While I cannot tell you where I hid these items after I learned their secret identity and location in the building from Pastor Doug, my predecessor, I can tell you this: one of the pastors before him did something extraordinary. He took the plans the Nazis developed for a time machine and built one! That means we have three incredible treasures on site, all thanks to Pastor Pfleuger and Dr. Jones: the Holy Grail out of which Jesus and his disciples drank at the Lord's Supper; the Ark of the Covenant, once described as a radio transmitter to God; and a fully functioning time machine.

Now I share this information with you because I have a confession, and as Martin Luther knew well, confession is good for the soul. Some of you may recall that at the end of our Easter service, I made an announcement. I reminded everyone that Easter is not simply a day; it's a season. To entice people who may not otherwise return until Christmas, I mentioned the plan for today's sermon. I would put the Apostle Paul on trial and have him defend himself against the charge of misogyny. Paul, many of us believe, was a sexist. In 1 Timothy, for example, he *allegedly* says — and I quote — "I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but *the*

woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty” (1:12-15).

The question, then, is whether the charge is justified. Did the Great Apostle truly believe that a woman, as later Christian theologians would argue, is somehow inferior to a man? What an important question we should be asking, especially as a congregation full of “spirited” women who are obviously as capable of anything men can do.

There is, however, one problem: I had no way to put Paul on trial. According to tradition, he died shortly after the Great Fire of Rome in AD 65. By this time, he had written at least seven of the fourteen letters attributed to him in the New Testament, including Romans, which some consider to be his masterpiece. I could, therefore, use the time machine to travel back and meet him – not to put him on trial but to interview him, the way a reporter would. The only other option would be to travel forward in time and meet him on the first day of God’s new creation – but can you imagine the line of people waiting to speak with him, the most widely read author in the history of Western Civilization?

And so, I decided on the former. I would travel back in time to meet Paul. Thankfully, the pastor who built the time machine left a set of instructions on how to use it. All I needed now was the Google Translator application on my fully charged phone, a tunic, some sandals, my allergy medication, and a list of questions I wanted to ask. The good news is that I knew exactly where to start: Paul’s conversion experience according to Acts 9, our First Reading for the Day.

Paul, I wrote in my notebook, you experienced a transformation on the road to Damascus that would forever change the way you see the world. How would you describe this transformation? In what way did it change your understanding of God, and what God was doing in Jesus, whose body – the church – you persecuted?

How, secondly, did the transformation you underwent change your relationships with other people, including not only your fellow Jews, the people of Israel, but also Greeks and Samaritans as well as foreigners and slaves? How, finally, did your new outlook affect the way you see women? Were they partners with you in your ministry, or did you truly believe that they should be silent and that men should be in charge?

What would Paul say, I wondered, especially as I wrote the last of these questions? And what would that mean for the women (and men) of Queen Anne Lutheran Church? Was Paul a misogynist, a man who believed women are inferior to men? Or had he begun something new in his ministry by *elevating women* to the status of men as essential to being what he calls a “new creation in Christ” (see 2 Cor. 5:17)?

Tune in next week to find out.

Amen.