

Do you remember playing hide-and-seek when you were young?  
???

Humans want to remain hidden.

One of the biggest obstacles to hearing Jesus speak  
is the fact that we're in hiding.

We are especially hiding from the one true God.

In fact, the Bible is a hide-and-seek story.

Except that the one seeking is God, and we are the ones hiding.

We are not created to **hide from God** but to **hide in God**.

When God does play hide-and-seek with us,

God hides in order to be found more deeply.

God hides so that we may more deeply discover and hear God.

But sometimes our very anxiousness about  
searching for God and straining harder to hear

God's voice is what prevents us  
from hearing God in the first place.

That makes me think that maybe we should stop searching for God  
and instead come out of hiding and let God find us.

I think the best hearing begins with our  
coming out of hiding and saying to God, "Here am I, Lord."

But Saul wasn't ready to be found, so God went to find Saul

Here was Saul, a man with a life rich in  
privilege, pedigree, power, and Torah-true righteousness.

Saul knew what it was like to be chosen.

First, he was a Jew, a member of a nation chosen by God  
to be in a unique relationship with God.

Second, within this Jewish identity, Saul was a Pharisee.

Among the chosen, Saul was chosen to wield special power and influence,  
because of his vast learning and piety.

Third, in addition to his chosen-chosen status,  
Saul also enjoyed a unique political status.

He was a Roman citizen, and that honor gave him  
rights and privileges that accrued to the

most powerful entity on earth—the Roman Empire.

Deeply layered in chosenness,

Saul started down the Damascus Road with a mission:

to round up and haul to Jerusalem followers of a nut named Jesus.

**Meanwhile, Saul was still spewing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest, 2 seeking letters to the synagogues in Damascus. If he found persons who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, these letters would authorize him to take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.**

One of the great hide-and-seek stories of history is the Damascus road story.

If ever there were evidence that Jesus comes to us,  
that Jesus comes to get us, that we are the  
hounded, the haunted, the hunted, it is this moment.

Have you noticed something about  
every post-resurrection appearance of Jesus?

They all begin because Jesus initiates it.  
We have a God who comes to us.

**3 During the journey, as he approached Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven encircled him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice asking him, "Saul, Saul, why are you harassing me?"**

**5 Saul asked, "Who are you, Lord?" "I am Jesus, whom you are harassing," came the reply. 6 "Now get up and enter the city. You will be told what you must do."**

On the road to Damascus, a Seeking God and Blinding Voice  
knocked Saul (soon to be known as Paul) off his "high horse"  
and turned his world upside down.

Has that happened to you?

That once you heard Jesus call your name,  
you fell on your knees, proclaiming Jesus "Lord,"  
and got up as a changed person with a new name, and chose new paths?

While Jesus' appearance to Paul was different in character  
from the rest of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances  
this encounter with Paul was not a vision or a dream.

Because both Jesus' voice  
and the bright light talked about later on  
were perceived by Paul's traveling companions.

**7 Those traveling with him stood there speechless; they heard the voice but saw no one.**

But for me and maybe for you, we know  
not every change of heart happens like a scene from a movie.  
Someone said **Sometimes the loudest quiet**

**comes from the quieting of the loudest places.**

And sometimes it is best when Jesus speaks with the loudest quiet voice  
Because we realize Hebrews is right when it says Faith is **“the substance of things hoped for,  
the evidence of things not seen”**.

What kind of evidence is the kind that is not seen?

What kind of faith is that—hoped for substance?

Paul learned both the hard way on the dirty, dusty Damascus Road.

We hear best when we are open, when we are transparent.

You know what else is transparent? Glass.

Glass reflects whatever shines through it.

When we experience Jesus’ touch and hear His voice,  
we are brought into the light.

To be brought into light, where light can shine through you,  
you are revealed and redeemed, and become a child of the Light.

As a child of the Light, you are given new glasses,  
new eyes, transparent to the truth, transparent for all to see.

To be redeemed is to be revealed.

Before the blinding voice,

Paul was like a torch burning bright,

but he shone with his own light.

Now he wouldn’t see any light.

**8 After they picked Saul up from the ground, he opened his eyes but he couldn’t see. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. 9 For three days he was blind and neither ate nor drank anything.**

After Jesus’ blinding voice on the Damascus Road,

a blazing torch turned into a heap of ashes.

Paul was no longer like a torch but a diamond,

that brilliantly reflected a borrowed light;

without its source, the diamond would be nothing but a dead stone.

One day on the Damascus Road, Paul suddenly

found himself at zero—even less than zero!

A flash of blinding light, a heavenly voice,

and everything he thought mattered didn’t matter at all now.

Maybe you have been there.

I know I have.

Those times when you reconsidered what really

matters in this life and how we want to live it and be remembered.

The only thing that mattered to Paul now? The fact that he knew Christ.

For Paul, and for us, the Jesus of history must become the living Christ if we are to hear Jesus' voice.

And we listen to that voice through the Holy Spirit.

Once you are voice-activated ( examples), Google Siri

New things begin to happen.

The journey of sanctification, as followers of John Wesley is to move from leaking the light to living and shining the light.

And when that Blinding Voice is through with you...**you need a Mentoring Voice.**

The voice of Jesus speaking comes from both outside of us and inside of us.

And it's the same voice.

But want to know something interesting?

As far as we know from the accounts in the Gospels,

Jesus appeared in person after His resurrection

only to those who had known Him.

Not one physical appearance occurred before this to a non-disciple.

Jesus "appeared" to Paul in a blinding voice and

then also through an unsuspecting disciple, Ananias.

**10 In Damascus there was a certain disciple named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision, "Ananias!" He answered, "Yes, Lord."**

To hear the voice of God, you need to be in a relationship with God.

Even a negative, always-fighting relationship is better than no relationship.

The sheep, whether black, gray, or white, recognize the Shepherd's voice.

But one of the hardest things to say in life is 3 words.

What are those three words?

I need help.

And yet all of us need help in life for one thing or another,

Helping others is not a hobby or merely lending a helping hand;

service is an act of holiness,

It is a heritage, an inheritance as heirs of Christ.

And mentoring is one of the highest forms of service.

I loved being a mentor when I was on the Board of Ordained Ministry for a decade and serving as District Committee on Ministry Chair during that time, wherever I served,

and still I serve on our District Committee  
doing the same thing for local pastors  
and those searching out their call to ministry.  
Paul needed help to hear God. He needed a mentor, an instructor.

You've heard talk about "sweet surrender"?  
There's nothing sweet about it.  
Paul had to be blindsided and go blind to reality to hear the truth.  
His vision was so self-focused, his hearing so self-absorbed,  
he needed to be blinded before he could "see,"  
and deafened so he could hear.  
Plus, he needed someone to guide him  
from darkness to light, from deafness to hearing.

**11 The Lord instructed him, "Go to Judas' house on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul. He is praying.**

The only thing we know about Ananias is that  
he was a respected member of the  
fledgling followers of Jesus at Damascus, the very group  
Paul was bound and determined to persecute.  
And Ananias was attuned enough to Jesus' voice  
to hear it, trust it, and follow it.  
Although he did list a little concern:

**13 Ananias countered, "Lord, I have heard many reports about this man. People say he has done horrible things to your holy people in Jerusalem.**

Um "You do know, God, that this guy You want me to  
make an apprentice is the one and same person  
who is coming here to persecute us, right?"

Saul's personal appetite had been for success.  
He was a scholar, a Roman citizen, a respected Pharisee.  
His appetite for success had been satisfied.  
But Saul's desire, his longing for personal redemption,  
had still been unfulfilled until he met Jesus on the Damascus road.  
It was only after Saul's mentoring by Ananias,  
which translated the blinding voice into the language of his life,  
that Saul realized the satisfaction of his  
previous appetites had nothing to do with soul satisfaction.  
It was only after Ananias guided Saul in his stroke of insight  
that Saul felt the desires of his earthly life find their

true fulfillment in the love of God and the love of others.

It wasn't that Jesus directly healed Saul.

It was Saul's mentor (Jesus through Ananias) who healed him:

**17 Ananias went to the house. He placed his hands on Saul and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord sent me—Jesus, who appeared to you on the way as you were coming here. He sent me so that you could see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."** **18 Instantly, flakes fell from Saul's eyes and he could see again. He got up and was baptized.**

**Saul had been blind**, but immediately, **Paul could see**.

Once Paul could see, he knew the truth.

That there is within all of us a deep yearning,  
longing for the divine for God that nothing else can satisfy.

Only Jesus satisfies.

Only God is greater than everything and anything.

The mentoring voice of Ananias taught Paul the  
truths of that old song Jesus is all the World to Me.

Len Sweet says being formed as a disciple is nothing more, nor less,  
than a **community where everyone is an Ananias and everyone is being Ananias-ed**.

In other words, everyone is a mentor in hearing Jesus speak,  
and everyone has a mentor in hearing Jesus speak.

We all need mentors and guides to help us hear the voice of Jesus.

The theme of our Annual Conference this week  
Was rekindling our call and talking about 2 Timothy 1:6  
Where Paul is telling his young friend Timothy  
to rekindle the inner fire of the gifts God gave him.

it says Fan into flame (literally to stir up) the gifts of God.

Jesus, with his blinding voice, kindled the flame in Saul

So that he could burn bright for him.

Have you left your old life behind like Paul?

Let me ask you a question.

How is your flame doing?

Are you feeding the fire?

How do you need to hear Jesus speak in his blinding voice?