

“A Horse of Course”
Acts 9:1-9; 10-20
Rev. David Hutchinson
Sunday, May 5, 2019

Hollywood and horses go together.

Think of all the movies made about horses.

I think it’s because a horse represents all kinds of things to us.

The American West and our national culture - - are deeply connected to horses.

And because there are so many examples - -

I think that it’s really difficult to generalize about it.

So instead - - I’ll give a few specifics about horses - - and you can do the rest.

One common theme in horse movies is - - the wounded horse that helps heal a wounded rider or cowboy or girl. / Most notably the *Horse Whisperer* - - made about 10 years ago now. / In that classic Robert Redford movie - - a girl named Grace - - is wounded in a riding accident that also wounds her horse - - and kills her friend.

It’s a movie about healing and becoming stronger again.

A more recent horse movie about healing is called *Lean on Pete*. / Made two years ago, this amazing film follows the life of a boy named Charlie - - who moves to Portland, Oregon to try to restart his life. / Charlie befriends a washed up horse trainer and a failing racehorse. / When it becomes clear that the only future for the horse is to be slaughtered - - Charlie steals or frees the horse - - depending on how you look at it.

Both movies are about healing and becoming stronger.

And the main characters - - like the horses - - are wounded and vulnerable.

I bring all this up because there is a HORSE in one version of the story about Paul that is the scripture reading for this morning. / The story from Acts 9 is well

known to people familiar with their Bibles. / Paul is converted from the angry
oppressive Saul - - into a follower of Jesus.

But there is NO MENTION of a HORSE in the Bible.

It says Paul was travelling - - and so presumably there was a horse involved.

But the Bible doesn't bother to mention the horse.

MUCH more significant to the book of Acts - - is the BLINDING LIGHT.

A light blinds Paul on the journey and changes his life.

But the horse is not a major character - - if one at all - - for Luke who wrote Acts.

The painter Caravaggio, however - - has a very DIFFERENT take on it.

The painting is on your bulletin cover.

This painting, called "The Conversion of Paul" - - was painted around 1600 - -
and the horse takes CENTER STAGE. / This horse is STRONG and powerful. / And
it is Paul who is vulnerable and weak - - laying on the ground on his back.

Paul's weapons are lying useless on the ground and his helmet has come off.

As I thought about this painting I wondered about the horse.

What was Caravaggio trying to get us to see?

Why did he depict the event this way?

With this powerful horse - - overpowering Saul?

Could it be - - that part of what Saul had to give up was his power?

Saul was NOT vulnerable - - like our movie characters.

And neither is this horse in the painting.

The movies I mentioned had characters who were wounded and vulnerable.

They were on a journey of healing - - accompanied by the healing - - or freeing of
wounded and vulnerable horses - - who become their amazing companions.

Saul on the other hand - - before this conversion experience - - was a mean nasty powerful zealous persecutor of Jesus followers.

Jewish like Jesus - - but NOT a supporter of this NEW way.

When Saul was then BLINDED by a light on a road - - he was knocked down.

And MAYBE - - it took a POWERFUL HORSE - - to knock down such a powerful man - - and get him to become HUMBLE before God.

I think that humbling himself before God was at the heart of his conversion.

Ask yourself this:

What did Saul learn that changed him into Paul the Apostle?

Why did it take a period of BLINDNESS - - for him to finally see?

Think of who did the LOOKING in the ANCIENT world:

Men LOOKED.

And women were LOOKED AT.

The POWERFUL looked.

And the WEAK were looked AT.

During Paul's period of blindness - - he spent time with Ananias.

Ananias was a disciple of Jesus - - a follower.

But he didn't want to help Paul - - because of his MEAN evil reputation.

But God persisted and Ananias finally went.

And WHAT did God say Saul was being SHOWN?

According to the Bible - - God saw showing Saul how much he must suffer.

Being a follower of Jesus - - involves suffering.

It is a way of self sacrifice.

And it is humbling.

When Saul finally realized that - - SCALES fell from his eyes.

And he became Paul the apostle.

He went from zealously persecuting Jesus followers - -

- - to being one of the most zealous followers.

So where are our eyes closed - - to what God is doing in our lives?

What would it mean - - for you - - to let God in?

And will it take being thrown from the back of a powerful horse to get us to see?

OR - - where is the power in our world and our culture - - in need of correction?

Are there powerful forces and people - - who are like Saul?

And WHAT - - or WHO - - has access to a powerful horse like in the painting?

A poem called *Conversion* by a man named Andrew King contains the following stanzas that helped me reflect on these questions:

Could it be **you** - - staring into truth as into the sun,
 the searing shock of awareness
 burning away - - what you thought you'd known,
 until all you now can see is the fire of light?

Could it be - - **your eyes** trying to adjust
 to truth's reversal of shadow,
 the inside-out reshuffle of all your certainty,
 the upside-down disruption - - of rightness and way?

But now - - may your hands unclench, gentle;

May the sea of your heart lie quiet, calm;
 now may your mind become a cup, open,
 held in stillness like someone to be fed.

Now what you know is - - there is more truth
 prepared for you.

More insight, more learning to come.

But now you are ready,
 you are waiting,
 unblinking.

If Paul BLINKED - - before he was blinded - - who knows.

What we know is that after the scales fell - - he was able to look at the truth of
 Jesus without blinking - - and at the truth of his PAST - - without blinking.

He described his experience in the first chapter of Galatians.

He said that it was a revelation from God.

Not based on the teaching of people - - nor his own ideas.

But instead - - it was given to him by grace.

If we open ourselves to Paul's experience maybe we will better understand our
 own. / Maybe he can lead us in our own reconversion experiences...

And MAYBE - - there is wisdom in the story for the whole community.

Conversion - - may be not JUST an individual thing - - but a community thing
 too. / As a Presbyterian minister from New Jersey suggests in her writing on this text.

Beth Scibienski writes this:

“The story isn't just about Saul and his new calling.

It's about the new calling for his friends - -

who had to lead their leader by the hand when needed.

The story isn't just about Saul's blindness.

It's about Ananias and the others having to see Saul as - -
an instrument of God - - before it had happened.”

So I wonder about all that...

I think that there are things about God that we may be unable to see at first.

And they are revealed to us if we are open to them.

But I ALSO think - - that conversion influences how we see one another.

Do we see each other - - as God would want us to?

And if not - - what would it take...to open our eyes?

Surely not something as crazy as a talking horse!