



## SERMON RECAP

MAY 2, 2026

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

Called to Follow

Acts 9:1-15

“Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss, you’ll land among the stars.” This is a popular adage that has been popularized by both Norman Vincent Peale and Les Brown. We will put aside the disputed origin as well as the gross misunderstanding of astronomical truth. As we hopefully learned from the recent Artemis II mission (and basic astronomy) missing a shot to the moon would leave you trillions of miles from the closest star (other than our sun). Of course, the metaphoric truth of the saying is worth exploring.

Take a big shot, because even if you don’t reach your goal, the effort will pay off. You may fail, but you will learn something. What’s more, some times goals change; and that’s okay. If you plan for something big, but something gets in the way that makes you alter course, you might still find something amazing.

I say this because of an easily ignored detail of today’s story. Paul was on his way to Damascus when there was a great flash of light and the course of his life was altered forever. The question I have pondered before is this: “Why Damascus?”

On one level, the story tells us why Paul (he is referred to as Saul in this story, but Saul and Paul are the same guy. Saul is his Hebrew name. Paul is his Latin name) is going to Damascus. He was searching for Jews who believe that Jesus was the Christ. It was his mission (as evidence in chapter 7) to purge the Jewish faith from people who would claim Jesus. He approved of the murder of Stephen, and he was looking for more of this Jesus-based blasphemy.

But why Damascus? It is a 120 mile journey from Jerusalem to Damascus. There had to be other places where followers of Jesus were hanging out. Why would he travel so far?

Damascus was Paul’s moon shot. He was going big. Damascus carried a lot of symbolic weight in Jewish thought. Damascus is still the capital of Syria - and it has been an important city for millennia. The seat of power for the Assyrian Empire, Damascus was symbolic of Israel’s greatest enemy - the reason for the exile, the center of all that was evil and contrary to the LORD.

Damascus was also the edge of the world. It was on the margins of known civilization for most Jews, and it held deep prophetic and eschatological significance. There were many prophecies about Damascus’s destruction, but there were also prophecies about Jerusalem’s reach extending as far as Damascus some day. During the Second Temple period (roughly 200 BCE to 100 CE), Jewish apocalyptic groups used the name “Damascus” not just as a physical city, but as a theological symbol for the place of exile, spiritual rebirth, and the ultimate arrival of the Messiah.

Paul was taking his moon-shot - going to finish off the Jewish movement before it could do more damage. Instead, everything changed. Paul took a moon-shot but missed his target. Instead, he landed among the stars. He found something greater than he even anticipated. He encountered the Risen Christ and the course of humanity was forever altered.

Paul was called by Christ to something new. Instead of pursuing followers of Jesus, he would bring the good news to the Gentiles. Paul took a moon-shot, but everything changed along the way. It turned out though, that everything he had done up to that point had prepared him for this incredible pivot.

I think that’s a good reminder for all of us. Plans can change. Paths can take unexpected detours. That doesn’t mean that you’re doing anything wrong. It means life happens. Circumstances change. You gain insight, meet someone new, have a drastic change of luck. I don’t believe everything happens for a reason or as a part of God’s eternal plan. Some times things go awry, but I do believe God can meet you there any way.

There was a time in my life I thought I would be writing for *Sports Illustrated*, but life took me on a different path. It turns out, all of the preparations I made to be a columnist for a sports magazine actually prepared me pretty well for what I ended up doing.

If you are following a course of life that feels like it has been interrupted, it’s okay. God will meet you there. It might not happen in a flash of blinding light, but God may send you an Ananias. Find guides, encouragers, and teachers long the way. Hang onto your fellow pilgrims.

Take moon-shots, and be ready to be transformed along the way. God will meet you there. The destination might not be what you planned, but Christ can lead you to things that were even better than you dreamed.



NEXT WEEK:

Called to be in relationship, John 4:16-30, 39-42