

The call of Ananias

By [Diane Roth](#)

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On Sunday, we hear the story from John 21 of Jesus and Peter on the beach. Jesus asks Peter three times, "Do you love me?" and three times Peter answers, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Then Jesus tells him, "Feed my sheep." We also hear about how Saul became the apostle Paul, on the road to Damascus. Here he was, on the way to persecute the followers of the Way, and out of the blue, Jesus speaks to him, too: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" There he is struck blind, and when he sees again, he has a new calling as a follower of Jesus and a missionary to the gentiles.

On one Sunday, we hear stories of two of the main characters from the New Testament. But I can't help being drawn to Ananias.

Who is Ananias? In all of the drama of the story of Saul, we might not notice another drama taking place on the sidelines. It is the drama of God, telling Ananias to go and heal Saul.

It is clear that Saul is the main character in this drama. God even says that to Ananias. "Go, for he is my chosen instrument," God says. We are supposed to focus our attention on Saul. We are supposed to consider how his turn-around life, his passion, his calling.

But I can't help being drawn to Ananias instead.

Perhaps it is because, in my extremely brief theater career, I mostly played small parts. I was the second maiden from the left, a member of the crowd. Sometimes I had one glorious line. Once, in a church production of *Camelot*, I got to sing a wonderful solo as Nimue, the enchantress who lures Merlin away near the beginning of the play. Unfortunately, my part was heard but completely unseen, from behind a curtain.

I am good at playing the small parts.

Or maybe it's because I tend to look around the edges of things, at the margins, even outside the margins sometimes. Maybe it is because I am just a little bit subversive, deep down inside. I am always wondering about the people who get left out, whose stories are not told, whose names we don't know. I can't help being suspicious of what seems important. We know so much about Paul, and his adventures, and his churches, and his letters.

And then there is Ananias. He just gets this short scene in one chapter of the books of Acts. God tells him to go to Saul and heal him. God is sending Ananias into the lion's den, right into the jaws of the man who has vowed to eradicate the followers of Jesus from the earth. Ananias understandably has a word of protest. He has this brief "wait a minute" moment where he questions God's wisdom.

And then he goes, and he heals Saul.

It's a small part. It's off on the margins, something you notice out of the corner of your eye. Or maybe Saul is so loud and passionate and such a force for the church that you don't notice Ananias at all.

I can't help thinking, though, that a lot of God's work in the world is like this.

I once did a project where I asked people to send me their faith stories, which I would publish in a booklet and distribute to the congregation. So many people told me, "I don't have a faith story." But then we got to talking and it turned out that they did. It may have been the story of their prayers during their child's illness, or how God guided them from work in one city to another. It may have been a story from their courtship and marriage, something they learned from their great-uncle or taught their niece. But they were small stories, not big ones.

Still, when I think of the scene back in Damascus, when I imagine the hands of Ananias, I can't help imagine that they are really the hands of Jesus, in a cameo role.

A lot of God's work in the world is like this. It looks like a cameo role. But it is really the main thing.

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