

Tuesday 25 January 2022

The conversion of St Paul



The conversion of the anti-Christian zealot, Saul, to the apostle of Christ, Paul, is clearly related in the reading from the Acts of the Apostles, but it has to be remembered that this was a beginning: Saul took some time to become Paul and some time to begin to understand that his call to preach—to Jew and to Gentile—the saving power of Jesus, the Son of God, was something that was a whole life's journey for him. Paul says in his Letter to the Church in Galatia, 'God set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace ... Three years after (the Damascus Road conversion), I went up to Jerusalem.'

The preparation for this moment of his conversion was his whole life. This feast has been celebrated in the Church since the sixth century but became universal in the twelfth century.

Sermon and prayers of intercession © Nicola Williams.

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The liturgy assumes the service is Eucharistic. The prayers of consecration appear at the end.

The hymns are YouTube links. To hear the hymns please hover the mouse over each link, press Ctrl and then return.

To see service transcripts from previous weeks, please visit the page, <http://www.medlockhead.co.uk/resources/index.htm>

Introduction and welcome

HYMN 1 Mine eye have seen the glory (please click on this link to hear the hymn)

The Welcome

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

All Amen.

The Lord be with you

All And also with you.

The Preparation

**All Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:

The first commandment is this:

‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, with all your mind,
and with all your strength.’

And the second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’

There is no other commandment greater than these.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

All Amen. Lord, have mercy.

We were once dead through the trespasses and sins in which we lived,
but now we are alive together with Christ.

Through him we have access in one Spirit to the Father,
to whom we humbly confess our sins.

All Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you
and against our neighbour
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We are truly sorry
and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us,
forgive us all that is past
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life
to the glory of your name.
Amen.

Almighty God,
who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you,
pardon and deliver you from all your sins,
confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,
and keep you in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

The Gloria

This Gloria is sung to the tune of 'Cwm Rhondda'. Click [here](#) for the tune.

All Glory be to God in Heaven,
Songs of joy and peace we bring,
Thankful hearts and voices raising,
To creation's Lord we sing.
Lord we thank you, Lord we praise you,
Glory be to God our King:
Glory be to God our King.

Lamb of God, who on our shoulders,
Bore the load of this world's sin;
Only Son of God the Father,
You have brought us peace within.
Lord, have mercy, Christ have mercy,

**Now your glorious reign begin:
Now your glorious reign begin.**

**You O Son of God are Holy,
You we praise with one accord.
None in heav'n or earth is like you,
Only you are Christ the Lord.
With the Father and the Spirit,
Ever worshipped and adored:
Ever worshipped and adored.**

The collect for the conversion of St Paul

Almighty God,
who caused the light of the gospel
to shine throughout the world
through the preaching of your servant Saint Paul:
grant that we who celebrate his wonderful conversion
may follow him in bearing witness to your truth;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All Amen.

First reading

A reading from the book of the prophet Jeremiah

The word of the Lord came to me saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.'

Then I said, 'Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.' But the Lord said to me, 'Do not say, "I am only a boy"; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.'

Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me, 'Now I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.' *Jeremiah 1:4-10*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

Second reading

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

Saul was still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, and went to the high priest 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. Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' He asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' The reply came, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.' The men who were travelling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. 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. For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, 'Ananias.' He answered, 'Here I am, Lord.' 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, 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.' But Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name.' 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; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.'

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.' And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptised, and after taking some food, he regained his strength. For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God.' All who heard him were amazed and said, 'Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem among those who invoked this name? And has he not come here for the purpose of

bringing them bound before the chief priests?' Saul became increasingly more powerful and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Messiah. *Acts 9:1-22*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

HYMN 2 To God be the glory

[\(click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

Gospel reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew

All Glory to you O Lord.

Then Peter said in reply, 'Look, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?' Jesus said to them, 'Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.' *Matthew 19:27-30*

This is the Gospel of the Lord

All Praise to you O Christ.

Sermon

When we find out that someone is expecting a baby, one of the first things we ask is 'what are you going to call it?' A person's identity can be defined by their name and so parents usually take some time over this decision.

Names in the Bible are extremely important and each one, we often find, has a meaning that is related to personality traits or strengths. Some cultures still name children with particular identities in mind and, often, some women change their name when they are married to signify a union with a certain person and family. Names then are an indicator of something: status; relationship; traits; and strengths to name just a few.

Some of us are comfortable with our identity, with who we are and what we do, in fact, some of us bind our whole identities up in what we do so much so that we 'become' our job. We are known by others not necessarily for our personal characteristics and personality, but for the status we hold or the money we make or

simply the things that we do. Perhaps we even dress in a way that reflects what we do and not who we are.

Sometimes our jobs consume our identities to the point that we don't even stop to think about who we actually are, or what we actually think: we just focus on what we have to do tomorrow, or at the presentation next week, or the shift we need to put in tonight. I read somewhere that the difference between the USA and Europe is that when you meet a European for the first time, they will ask you your name. When you meet an American for the first time, they will ask you what you do. Either way, you have your own identity that is unique to you.

Saul was someone who became known for what he did—he became feared because he was so good at his job and was respected enough that his job brought him status. I am not talking about his actual job of tent making, I am talking about the job he had taken upon himself—that of persecuting Christian Jews. Saul was famed for his determination and relentlessness. He was so passionate about his job that he was willing to travel widely to track down and find Christian Jews probably at his own expense.

But Saul was in for a shock, a huge shock, as Jesus had plans for Saul and it was probably precisely because of his determination and relentlessness, that Jesus would use Saul in ways that he would never have imagined. Jesus had looked at Saul, and at his strengths and abilities, and He saw how they *should* be used.

Saul had skills; gifts given by God. (We all have gifts and talents given by God.) Saul was an excellent communicator with a seemingly immense amount of self-confidence. Saul was articulate, he was a tradesman with lots of contacts, and he was passionate. The trouble was that Saul was playing for the wrong team.

God, in His Mercy, has given us free will. We can make mistakes; we can make bad decisions and we can choose to be on the wrong team. We can take every gift and talent we have but put it to use in the wrong way if we are not careful. Saul thought that he was doing the right thing, but this is because he viewed himself in human terms. He thought that he was acting for God by getting rid of potential rule breakers and sinners. Saul's ideas about himself were so strong that he didn't stop to think and reflect, and he was clearly not listening to God. Saul had developed an identity and he was working hard to keep this going.

However, Jesus knows us inside and out. He knows our strengths and our weaknesses, and we have to believe, as followers of Christ, that we each of us have a purpose. Saul's sole purpose unbeknown to him, was to become Paul the Saint!

Jesus met with Saul in a supernatural way that so completely shocked him that he changed every single aspect of his life, Paul didn't just make a few resolutions or tweaks to his life. Rather, he simply but completely gave up who he had been and

became someone else. Nobody can do anything close to this on his or her own. It would surely be impossible, but God was with Saul, and He gave him grace to become a new person. Or did He?

If we look at St Paul, we find that he challenged leaders, respectable Apostles and Roman Officers alike. He was willing to face prison, mobs, and doubt at every turn. He talked his way out of dangerous situations and into the hearts and minds of strangers who came to believe on meeting him. The skills and talents he would have needed to withstand all of this, were the exact same skills and talents he had and used as Saul. He was just using them differently and, most importantly, he was now relying on Jesus Christ to guide and encourage him. He listened to the Holy Spirit and surrendered all that he was to the will of God. In the reading from Jeremiah today, God clearly tells us that He knows us and has a purpose for us...

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you.

so Paul became a new man but with the same gifts and he began to fulfil the life that God had planned for him.

Looking again at that reading from Jeremiah today, we can see how frightening and intimidating it must feel to find yourself called by God in such a way. I am sure that Saul needed those days at Judas' house, before Ananias came, to have a similar conversation with God ...

'Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.' But the Lord said to me, 'Do not say, "I am only a boy"; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.'

Whatever happened in that house, Saul was changed; Instead of persecuting Jesus and His followers, Paul was now one of His greatest advocates. And surely this was the plan all along...take the most feared opponent of Christianity and make them the most ardent supporter.

This was full scale shocking to all living in the Middle East at that time and announced the followers of Christ as more than they had previously been seen to be. Christian Jews underwent a change in status. Perhaps there was something to them after all: if Saul could believe then anyone could believe!

St Paul's story is very well known and, as Christians, we are familiar with his Epistles, but it is his reaction to Jesus that we need to concentrate on. Of course, there was an immediate physical reaction—Saul went blind. Then there was the emotional reaction—Saul prayed and fasted until Ananias came to see him but

next came the Spiritual reaction. Saul became Paul, not yet a Saint, but definitely a different man.

It is very easy to think that St Paul's story happened over those few days in Emmaus, but the reality was that those first few days were supernatural, and they were Spiritual. The real change came over the rest of Paul's life. Paul the new convert had to practice using his existing skills in a new way. He was now speaking to a new audience, and with a new purpose. Paul would have to build an authenticity about his newfound faith as he was ever going to convince others that he was genuine.

However, God was with Paul and gave him the words through the Holy Spirit just as He gave words to Jeremiah who was sent to ...

... pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.

Paul went on to face challenge upon challenge, he built up and, when necessary, tore down, and he planted the seeds of faith wherever he went. Each new hardship, each success and each challenge provided Paul with the opportunity to grow, to learn and to focus upon listening to Jesus so that, in the end, St Paul would go on to write and inspire a large part of the New Testament and become one of the best known of the Apostles.

The question is, then, what does St Paul's story have to do with us? We view our understanding of Jesus through the lens of 2000 years of history and surely things have changed since then! Although, God hasn't changed and so we know that miracles do still happen. Jesus is still our Lord and Saviour, and the Holy Spirit still speaks and so the only thing that has actually changed is us. Saul experienced a miracle for sure, but it was his response that mattered: Paul shook off everything he had been and thought and did and became something new.

Our response then is what matters. January is nearly over but it is never a bad time to reflect and to look to ourselves and ask if things are good in our lives, or if we could we be doing better? Are we using our God given gifts and talents in the right way? Are we listening for God? Are we looking for Jesus, and are we praying with the Holy Spirit?

Not every change has to be profound. Paul didn't become a Saint overnight. The key is to recognise our own gifts and talents—the things that usually make us happiest and most fulfilled—and use these to serve God. God has a plan for our lives. It may be incomprehensible right now or you may well be on the right path. The only way to know is to be aware of your own identity. Has it become more about status than passion, or are you tied more to the money that you make than

the way in which you make it? It may be that you are hiding a secret talent or afraid to share your gifts with others. Reflecting on our lives is a must and where we fall short or where we are struggling, we know with certainty that we can speak to Jesus about it. Equally, where we are thriving and shining, we can thank God for His Grace and Mercy.

Whatever we do and however we reflect, know that you are loved, and that God didn't leave anyone out—we are all special in our own way. You just need to focus on being you!

The Creed

Do you believe and trust in God the Father,
the source of all being and life,
the one for whom we exist?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son,
who took our human nature,
died for us and rose again?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit,
who gives life to the people of God
and makes Christ known in the world?

All We believe and trust in him.

This is the faith of the Church.

All This is our faith.

**We believe and trust in one God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.**

Prayers of intercession

Heavenly Father

In Your mercy, you showed Saul that he was misusing his gifts and zeal and was persecuting rather than celebrating those who had found You in Jesus. Help us all to understand Your call and to celebrate those gifts which You have given us and to use them in service of each other, rather than ourselves.

Lord in Your Mercy

All Hear our prayer

Merciful God

You have not forgotten any of us and have heaped upon us all, blessings and gifts through which we can love You and serve. Each of us holds within us a spark of You. Help us to fan the flame and build that spark into a fire which burns with a passion and zeal for serving and joyfully praising Your Holy Name. In this season of new beginnings and new resolutions, help us to reflect upon our lives and to turn away from harmful influences and towards Your love. You sent Your Son to love us and to show us the way and Your Holy Spirit to be our guide and our companion on the road back to You. Help us to recognise Your voice in those still, quiet moments and in those hectic, tempestuous times alike.

Lord in Your Mercy

All Hear our prayer

Merciful God

We pray for those who have to hide their Christian identity for fear of violence and oppression. Just as You spoke to Saul, speak to those who fear You and want to rid Your children from society. Help us to help the isolated in any way that we can and to never forget their struggle to live lives with You at the heart of all things. We pray for Your Church, that it can shine out in the darkness of oppression and in the presence of violence, and can provide hope, shelter and belonging to those who long to know Your love.

Lord in Your Mercy

All Hear our prayer

Merciful God

We pray for those who have been affected by Covid and disease. For those who are sick and for those who are caring for the sick. We ask for healing Lord as You know best. You have a plan for each of us and the number of our days are known only unto You. We pray for Your peace to be with all of those who are worried at this time, we pray for Your strength for those families who are caring for their sick, and we pray for Your Comfort for those who are struggling, including those we know...

Lord in Your Mercy

All Hear our prayer

Merciful God

We pray for those whose passing is remembered at this time. For those who have recently passed and for those who are grieving. Our grief is a reflection of our love, but we need Your comfort and Your peace to help us to live with the loss that we feel.

Merciful Father,

All accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.

The peace

Let the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus.

The peace of the Lord be always with you,

All And also with you.

HYMN 3 [Agnus Dei](#)

(please click on this link to hear the hymn)

The liturgy of the Communion Service appears below

The Dismissal

May Christ who called Paul to his service,
and to preach the good news to the world,
strengthen you to witness to his grace and love.

And the blessing of God the Almighty:

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

be with you now and remain with you always.

All Amen.

HYMN 4 [Revelation song](#)

(please click on this link to hear the hymn)

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

All In the name of Christ. Amen.

The Liturgy of the Sacrament

Eucharistic Prayer (prayer E)

The Lord be with you

All and also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

All We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All It is right to give thanks and praise.

It is indeed right and good, our duty and our joy,
at all times and in all places to give you thanks and praise,
holy Father, almighty and eternal God,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

For on this day he called to his service
the blasphemer and persecutor of your Church.

Saul, who had resisted your grace,
became Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles.

Because he was faithful and true in his ministry,
you made him an example of patient service,
to instruct in the way of eternal life

all those who heard his preaching and believed your word.

Now, therefore, he who became your chosen instrument
for the salvation of the nations

has made us also eager to proclaim your mercy,
and sing in union with all the powers of heaven
the joyful hymn of your praise:

**All Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

We praise and bless you, loving Father,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord;
and as we obey his command,
send your Holy Spirit,
that broken bread and wine outpoured
may be for us the body and blood of your dear Son.

On the night before he died he had supper with his friends
and, taking bread, he praised you.

He broke the bread, gave it to them and said:
Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;
do this in remembrance of me.

When supper was ended he took the cup of wine.
Again he praised you, gave it to them and said:
Drink this, all of you;
this is my blood of the new covenant,
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

So, Father, we remember all that Jesus did,
in him we plead with confidence his sacrifice made once for all upon the cross.

Bringing before you the bread of life and cup of salvation,
we proclaim his death and resurrection
until he comes in glory.

Great is the mystery of faith:

All Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.

Lord of all life,
help us to work together for that day
when your kingdom comes
and justice and mercy will be seen in all the earth.

Look with favour on your people,
gather us in your loving arms
and bring us with St Paul and all the saints
to feast at your table in heaven.

Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all honour and glory are yours, O loving Father,
for ever and ever.

All Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

**All Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

Breaking of the Bread

We break this bread to share in the body of Christ.

**All Though we are many, we are one body,
because we all share in one bread.**

**All Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
grant us peace.**

Draw near with faith.

Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ
which he gave for you,
and his blood which he shed for you.

Eat and drink in remembrance that he died for you,
and feed on him in your hearts
by faith with thanksgiving.

All We do not presume
to come to this your table, merciful Lord,
trusting in our own righteousness,
but in your manifold and great mercies.
We are not worthy
so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table.
But you are the same Lord
whose nature is always to have mercy.
Grant us therefore, gracious Lord,
so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ
and to drink his blood,
that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body
and our souls washed through his most precious blood,
and that we may evermore dwell in him,
and he in us.
Amen.

Communion is distributed.

Prayer after Communion

Lord God, the source of truth and love,
keep us faithful to the apostles' teaching and fellowship,
united in prayer and the breaking of bread,
and one in joy and simplicity of heart,
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen

All Almighty God,
we thank you for feeding us
with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.
Through him we offer you our souls and bodies
to be a living sacrifice.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit
to live and work
to your praise and glory.
Amen.