

“As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” “Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked. “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied.” Acts 9:3-5 (NIV)

Today's passage is the conversion of Paul on the way to Damascus. Paul used to be called Saul. Saul was one of the people who persecuted the church and was really proud of his achievements in the knowledge of Jewish law and how zealously he persecuted the church that he saw as heretics...until Jesus intervened personally and stopped him in his tracks, gave him a new name (Paul) and tasked him as the one to start going out to the Gentiles.

Its somewhat more complicated than that, Saul becoming Paul wasn't just something that happened overnight, even though the initial conversion was practically instantaneous. The latin origin of Paul means small, little or humble. I like to think that Paul was given this name to remind him to remain humble. A permanent reminder to live up to and something to strive for through his life. He couldn't tell anyone his name without the meaning hitting him - also reminding him that he is just a small cog in the works that is God's Kingdom purpose, albeit that every small cog is important.

Paul's conversion is a big fanfare event, a dramatic and life changing moment that many of us will never be blessed (if thats really the right way to put it) to experience, but that isn't really the important thing here. What is really important is that God will choose people who will be zealous for His purpose, regardless of how far away they mat be when that start. Saul was zealous for God, he was just directing it in the wrong direction. Jesus personally appeared to redirect that vision of Saul, into a new person with a new purpose as Paul.

Did you have a big fanfare to convert you into the faith? Were you someone who encountered Jesus through spiritual teaching and can give the exact time, date and year that you became a christian? Or where you more like me - Always knowing God is real and cant remember a time when you didn't believe (and sometimes feeling that those who can give their exact time and day or have the big experiences are somehow 'more spiritual' or just of more worth - believe me, that isn't true...your life of faith is just as important, even if you don't have a big testimony to share in the same way)? Regardless of how you came to faith, God has a purpose for you. He has chosen you as a little cog in His grand design. Every cog is important. If just one cog in a machine is broken it needs to be mended or replaced for the entire machine to work efficiently.

Yesterday we discussed Jesus as the living water and the vine through which we as the branches are kept alive to bear fruit. Today we can follow on from that and see how that life, filled with the living water, can be lived out. Paul was filled with this living water when he went out to preach the Good News. The fruit he was able to bear in Jesus' name still continues to bear fruit today. Churches were planted throughout the Gentile countries and we often listen to the words of Paul's letters to these churches (including some he wasn't responsible for setting up) in modern church services. Was Paul a perfect role model? Absolutely not. He was human, just as the rest of us are...but his zeal, combined with keeping himself filled with the correct source of water meant that Jesus could work through him and the church spread around the known world faster than one would possibly think possible in the first century AD without the aid of modern social media and other other communication types that make contacting people so globally easy today.

Pray;

Lord Jesus, who appeared personally to Paul and redirected his zeal onto the Way, please help us, whatever our background may be, to be open to being cogs in your kingdom. May we forever remember how small we are and to never allow our positions to make us proud. Whether we are a CEO, a struggling sole trader, someone on benefits or someone who finds our finances in abundance or anything else in-between, help us to be examples of your kingdom wherever we happen to be. Give us the zeal to be as brave as Paul going into the future. Amen.