

Called, Changed & Sent

Text: Acts 9:1-6, 7-10

Revelation 5:11-14 (Series C, 3rd Sunday in Easter) Ps. 30

John 21:1-19

Let us pray:

The story told in our first reading this morning is a *great* story. The action of this story is fascinating but what is even more amazing is that it is a story of how God chooses the most unlikely people, at the most unexpected times, and in the most unpredictable ways.

Saul was the last person you would have expected God to pick as a proclaimer of the Good News about Jesus. He was enthusiastic about the Jewish faith, in fact he was so enthusiastic that he had made it his personal ambition to harass and persecute as many Christians as he could find.

Saul was a powerful, self-confident, influential person. He considered that he was in control of his life. He had a clear purpose. Saul made it his personal ambition in life to inflict the cruellest persecution on all Christians.

Acts records this, "*Saul tried to destroy the church; going from house to house, he dragged out the believers, both men and women, and threw them into jail (Acts 8:1,2).*

Then, at a most unexpected place and time, while on the road to Damascus, the resurrected Jesus appeared and spoke to Saul. Powerful, self-confident, in controlled Saul has fallen on the ground!

A bright light flashed around him, a voice from heaven spoke to him and told him to go to the city and there he would receive instructions what he was to do. The powerful and self-confident Saul is no longer in charge; he is a servant doing what he is told.

He was blinded and was led by the hand, like a little child back to Damascus. For three days he wasn't able to see, and he ate and drank nothing. His life had been radically disturbed and interrupted by the risen Christ.

Another man whose life was amazingly turned upside down and back to front by God was a ship's captain, by the name of John Newton. John Newton was making a lot of money shipping human cargoes namely slaves from Africa to America. Then God at a most unexpected time dealt with him.

Newton wrote *"I can see no reason why the Lord singled me out for mercy unless it was to show, by one astonishing instance, that with him "nothing is impossible"*. He spent off-duty hours reading the New Testament given to me by his grand mother and praying.

God came to Newton's cabin and dealt graciously and lovingly with the shameless, and immoral sailor. His life was radically changed and the ship's cabin became a place of conversion like the Damascus Road.

Later John Newton penned these words that express what happened, *Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretched like me! I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.*

John Newton is expressing exactly what Paul meant when he said, *"For I am the least of all the apostles—I do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted God's church. But by God's grace I am what I am" (1 Cor 15:9,10a).*

There is no doubt that on that day on the Damascus Road Paul's life was changed. Most of our stories are far less dramatic than that. Maybe your journey of faith doesn't include a blinding light, a voice speaking to you and telling you what to do, a dramatic conversion to faith on a certain day and at a certain place.

Maybe your faith journey has been a gradual process, or a gradual awareness that God loves you and has plans for your life. Maybe your faith has grown through your parents, teachers, friends and pastors who have slowly and steadily enabled your faith to grow without the bright lights of a sudden conversion.

It doesn't matter finally how, when and where and how you came to believe in Jesus. There are three points that come from our text:

1. *This story is about God's grace.* It is not about us, it is all about God- Paul is a Christian, not by his own decision, discovery, or desire.

Paul is called, chosen by the action of the living Christ. His relationship to Christ was Christ's idea long before it was Paul's. So is ours. Jesus once said, "*You didn't choose me, I chose you*" (John 15:16).

We are here today, as Christians and his disciples, because, for some strange, surprising wonderful reason, he wants us to be a member of his kingdom, to enjoy knowing about God's undeserved love and forgiveness for us. Salvation is all about God, and we can't take credit for it.

Paul didn't decide for Jesus. On the Damascus Road Jesus decided for Paul. In whatever way you have come into God's kingdom, maybe at the baptismal font, maybe a gradual coming to faith, or maybe a dramatic conversion. It was God's idea long before it was yours.

"I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew He moved my soul to seek him, seeking me; It was not I that found thee, O Saviour true, No I was found of thee"

2. *The story of Paul's conversion is about new beginnings.* Paul was a ruthless, influential, self-confident persecutor of Christianity. On the Damascus Road, he changed from a persecutor of Jesus to a proclaimer of the Good News.

It is true that God takes you and me "*just as we are without plea*". But he doesn't leave us just as we are. He changes us and keeps on changing us. It's a continual process as long as we live on this earth. A lifelong process of change:

- from lovelessness to love,
- from pride to humility,
- from a lack of self-control to self-control,
- from impatience to patience,
- from harshness to gentleness,
- from apathy to commitment,
- from stinginess to generosity

The church is the community of those *being* converted, *being* born again, and again, and again". Likewise, Martin Luther emphasizes the ongoing changing process when he says,

"Because we are baptized we should keep on drowning the old nature we are born with; everything sinful and selfish in us has to die. ... And the new nature God has given us in baptism should come to life day after day. We should live as new people.... (Small Catechism 1996 Open book Publishers page 27)

3. This story about Paul's conversion clearly tells us that his transition from darkness to light, from evil to God's kingdom was *for a purpose*. Paul wasn't converted to Christ to sit and do nothing. He was *Called, Converted* and then *Sent* to bring God's Good News to people in his known world.

It wasn't easy. Paul suffered the same things that we do – he was mocked for his faith, thrown into prison, endured storms and shipwrecks, was beaten, stoned. Life wasn't easy as a follower of Jesus but he used none of it as an excuse for giving up.

- We all know that life in the church can be tough sometimes.
- We are called to act with love and understanding even when we don't agree with someone and something that is happening in the church.
- We are called to give generously of our time and energy to further God's work through the church.
- We are called to be in mission for others in Christ– that is to actively support and do it. It's easy to leave it up to someone else.

During the Second World War, a church in Strasbourg was destroyed. After the bombing, the members of this particular church went to see what was left and found that the entire roof had fallen in, leaving a heap of rubble and broken glass.

Much to their surprise, however, a statue of Christ with outstretched hands that had been carved centuries before by a great artist was still standing. It was virtually unharmed except that a falling beam had sheered off both hands.

The people called on a sculptor in town and asked if he could replace the hands of the statue. He was willing, and he even offered to do it for free. The church council met to consider the sculptor's proposition – but decided not to accept his offer.

Why? Because they felt that the statue without hands would be the greatest illustration possible that God calls his people to be his *hands* in this world to do the work he has given. And I may add not, only our *hands*, but also our *feet*, our *lips*, our *eyes*, our *ears*, our *intellect*, our *abilities*, our *money* – God has given all of these to us to carry out his work.

Have you ever thought of yourself this way? Have you ever thought of yourself as the hands of Jesus? Jesus chooses to do his work through human hands. Sometimes they seem to be the weakest of hands, the least potentially successful hands, or the least qualified hands — but those are the hands God uses.

In Matthew 4:19, Jesus first calls Simon Peter and his brother Andrew to follow him and he will teach them to be fishers of people. Now we are called again to follow and to tend and feed the smallest to the oldest, all who belong to our *Most Worthy Lamb, the Lord Christ Jesus*, as his own instruments to bring his Name to all we meet.

Let us polish up our Lenten promises and good intentions, and overcome our reluctance to give of ourselves in new and different ways. Let's cast our nets on the other side of Christ's boat, the one we usually avoid, to go fishing in God's pastures wherever they are, simply caring for *all* the Flock, as we continue *following* the call of Christ our Lord.

If God can use Saul who seemed to be the least qualified to be an apostle, he can also use you and I. If Saul can be his chosen servant, then so can you as well as those around you. Just as Saul was *called, changed (converted), and sent* so also have you and I been *called and changed and sent* to do the work of God.

The choice is really ours, to how we respond.

Amen.

May 1, 2022

Prayer concerns: *Matilda Molyneaux-Piper, Shirley Walker, Hanne Bourgeoise, Sven Berg, Astrid Hylland, Ellen Eriksen, Euclide & Ellen Dahal-Lanteigne, Karen Abazio, Wilhelmina Tiemersma, Matilda Molyneaux-Piper, Soo Young, Shirley Walker, Pastor Timothy, Sharon Nielson (in Herbert, Sask.) the dire tension between Russia and Ukraine, Protectors at various places in Canada, Covid -19 patients, essential and Frontline workers, Note: of thanks to God as the Covid-19 virus is easing off and more restrictions are being lifted, and finally Families of departed souls in recent weeks and months.*

Prayer: Christ Jesus, Master of the Earth and Sea, in casting Your net to the other side, You brought Saul aboard to open his eyes to a new Way. Grant us new sight, leaving all judgment to You, to be Your love-in-action for all sides of Your boat. We ask through the fullness of the Holy Spirit, and the power of the Almighty, who together with You reign as One God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Make melodies in your heart with these hymns:

- **God Is Here # 526**
- **Amazing Grace # 779**
- **You Are Mine # 581**

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

n/a

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

n/a