

Conversion

Saturday 25th January – Conversion of St Paul



*Conversion of Saint Paul Artist Unknown
Niedersaechsisches Landesmuseum, Hannover, Germany*

Scripture: Acts 26.9-23

‘Indeed, I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And that is what I did in Jerusalem; with authority received from the chief priests, I not only locked up many of the saints in prison, but I also cast my vote against them when they were being condemned to death. By punishing them often in all the synagogues I tried to force them to blaspheme; and since I was so furiously enraged at them, I pursued them even to foreign cities.

‘With this in mind, I was travelling to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, when at midday along the road, your Excellency, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and my companions. When we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It hurts you to kick against the goads.” I asked, “Who are you, Lord?” The Lord answered, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But get up and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and testify to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you. I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”

‘After that, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout the countryside of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God and do deeds consistent with repentance. For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. To this day I have had help from God, and so I stand here, testifying to both small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would take place: that the Messiah must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.’

To reflect

Today is the day the church remembers the Conversion of St Paul. Someone who had persecuted the followers of Jesus, but then had an experience and changed his life around. Paul became ‘Apostle to the Gentiles’, spreading the good news across the Mediterranean, setting up and encouraging churches, writing epistles that remain and are part of the New Testament.

We all have realisations on our journeys of faith in God, some that are sudden and unexpected and others that are more gradual, that we come to realise we believe over time. Both are from God and part of our faith.

Today you’re invited to read an Epistle of the Apostle Paul: Galatians, Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Philemon, Philippians, or 1 Thessalonians and reflect on it in the context of your faith today.

Collect for the Conversion of St Paul

Almighty God,
by the preaching of your servant Paul
you caused the light of the gospel to shine throughout the world.
May we who celebrate his wonderful conversion
follow him in bearing witness to your truth;
through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you
and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

Apostle by Malcolm Guite

An enemy whom God has made a friend,
A righteous man discounting righteousness,
Last to believe and first for God to send,
He found the fountain in the wilderness.
Thrown to the ground and raised at the same moment,
A prisoner who set his captors free,
A naked man with love his only garment,
A blinded man who helped the world to see,
A Jew who had been perfect in the law,
Blesses the flesh of every other race
And helps them see what the apostles saw;
The glory of the lord in Jesus’ face.
Strong in his weakness, joyful in his pains,
And bound by love, he freed us from our chains.

[from Sounding the Season by Canterbury Press]

To Listen (these and other suggestions can be found on a Spotify playlist at

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/0F5bU2sf4OiOtQY3q78Rf2?si=a99cbbf61e7d4587>)

- ‘All that is Hidden’ by Bernadette Farrell. This modern hymn explores themes of discipleship and ministry.
- ‘We Sing the Glorious Conquest’ by John Ellerton, one version is by Newcastle Cathedral Choir. This hymn tells the story of St Paul.
- ‘Love Never Ends’ by The Corner Room, three movements with settings of the text of 1 Corinthians 1-13.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.