

Let's get a bit of context, where are we at.

Jesus has been around, preaching, gathering disciples, then the cross, death and resurrection.

The ascension, Jesus leaves behind a scattering of scared and unsure disciples.

Peter is going a good job at steadying the ship.

We see more miracles, and then Pentecost.

The coming of the Holy Spirit.

Numbers Swell.

But Jesus had promised salvation and good news for everyone and it wasn't immediately clear who was going to do this, who was going to spread the word?

Paul

So leading up to this encounter with Jesus we know a few things about Paul...

We might know of him as the

Christian Killer,

the hunter

He like one of the bad guys from Game of Thrones.

He had a reputation

Our very own St Stephen was martyred with Paul in attendance.

The glorious picture here in church shows this scene, and we see Paul looking on.

He was infamous.

But how did he get there...?

The story of conversion that we have heard today is without doubt an important moment for Paul.

But I want to begin by going back further

Paul, born in the city of Tarsus the capital of the Province of Cicillia, which is now Turkey.

It was an important busy place, a trade centre.

He was born into a Jewish family, of the tribe of Benjamin.

We think he spent lots of his time growing up in Jerusalem, studying under a Rabbi called Gamaliel who is actually one of the most notable Rabbi's in history.

He was relatively well travelled and spoke a couple of different languages, we know he was a good communicator, articulate, he would become a passionate speaker and poetic writer.

He was a Roman Citizen, Paul certainly seems proud of this. It was highly prized and fairly rare for a Jew at the time. He has a bit of parity with the occupying Roman forces, which comes in handy.

Paul is doing well for himself , climbing the ladder, getting rid of Christians,

And he meets with Jesus
He meets with the resurrected Christ, as we will do through communion later.

But who would choose Paul?
Would you choose Paul?

Jesus does.

God is the god of the unexpected.

And so they meet, Jesus and Paul

on the Damascus Road.

There is a bright light and a voice

Who are you Lord, Paul says

It is me Paul, Its Jesus,
Jesus who you have been persecuting.

One translation reads: Why have you been resisting me.
Why have you been kicking against the goad.

Why have you been resisting me.

I don't know about you but my conversion, or my coming to faith didn't involve
a bright light,
mysterious voice,
temporary blindness
and then healing.

I hope that it is a continuing transformation, its not a necessarily a thing that happened nor was it a moment but something that's happening.

Pauls story continues,

He is left blind after his encounter with Jesus

And is then lead into Damascus.

Then poor old Ananias comes in to the story, I love Ananias.

He is sent to restore Pauls sight.

Are you sure God? He says

Are you really choosing him?

Ananias is brave and faithful and he goes to heal Paul.

I love the words he uses to greet him, Brother Saul, Jesus has sent me so you may see again.

What a welcome, to this man who was on his way to chuck him in prison.

Already, despite his misgivings he welcomes Paul into the family, into the church.

I think Ananias is the real hero in this story.

We don't really hear anything else about him,
this was his job
to give Paul his sight,
to open his eyes,
to accept him as a brother in Christ.
To be a part of this transformation that would change the world.

We can learn from Ananias not to despise the small things,
the surprises,
the welcome
all the little things that are all part of Gods work through us.
Being open to the holy spirit.

In the conversion of Paul we read a message of transformation
But whatever gain I had I have counted loss for the sake of Christ. He goes on to say.

Paul's transformation of heading to the top with a lethal focus to living out the teaching of Jesus, and putting himself last, behind everyone else.

This is a Jesus who meets with people,
Jesus who is still meeting with people
And offering a different way being.

We find Hope for the broken,
bringing light where there was darkness

Would we choose Paul?

We've got an important mission that we are starting up at church here at St
Stephens, I know, we will get Paul to do it, lets choose the person who hates
everyone.

Don't think so

Who would go and lay hands on him to heal him?

Brother, Ananias calls him

God surprises us with who he chooses

In hindsight Paul was an excellent choice. Highly literate, multi lingual, he had a
good CV.

We've just got the problem of killing all those Christians.

I wonder what unexpected jobs does God have for us?

Or even for the least likely people in our community?

Have a think, who is the least likely person you know to become a Christian?

That scumbag from work, or in the office, maybe that's just the person God is
calling.

We have a God who transforms lives,

Lives changes and transformed through relationships with God and one another.

Who calls the unlikely, might just be calling them,

and asking us to play the role of Ananias.

That's a hard call.

I'll finish by borrowing a story from Adrian Newman, its about when Christ
returns to heaven after the ascension, he sent the disciples out with the good
news and he has gone home.

As he enters heaven an angel asks him, so what is plan B, what if they don't do it.

Jesus replies, there is no other plan, they are the plan, Paul, all those guys at St
Stephens... they are the plan