

Small Groups @ TBC

Sermon Discussion Notes

Date of Sermon: May 14th 2017

Speaker: Sally Heath

Title: A Life Transformed

Introduction: Acts 9 actually mentions a number of lives transformed by Jesus: Aeneas paralysed and bedridden for 8 years is healed by Jesus through the work of Peter; Tabitha/ Dorcas, died and was raised to life, again through the work that Peter was doing in the name of Jesus; the many who come to 'believe in the Lord' because of these miracles and the preaching of Saul/Paul; and the transformation of Paul's life as he encounters Jesus in his conversion, his calling and through the Christian community.

Review: Invite one or more who have heard the talk to give their own brief review.

Read: Acts 9:1-31

Reflect:

Conversion

When people speak of a 'Damascus Road' experience they mean something dramatic has happened to completely turn around their thinking, or an experience when their eyes were opened to some new reality. Paul set out from Jerusalem to persecute the Christians in Damascus convinced that he was doing God's work, but in Damascus he 'baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah' (v22).

- Read Paul's summary of his early life in Philippians 3:5-6 and discuss what it was that changed for Paul on the Damascus Road.

It doesn't matter how apparently dramatic or ordinary our experience of Jesus is; it is encountering him that matters and what we do about that encounter. All Christian conversions are miraculous and all are dramatic and life-changing - that is what is meant by conversion. Jesus transforms all who come to him and it is the encounter with Jesus that matters, not what we have or haven't done before.

- Gavin Calver in the clip from Getting Your Kids Through Church spoke of the danger of 'Hollywood Testimonies' where Christians try to make their conversion sound more dramatic than it really was. Have you ever felt that pressure and if so, why? What is the danger with them?
- Listen to each other's stories of your encounter with Jesus which led to your conversion; or write a brief summary of your life before conversion (like Paul's in Philippians) and then one of your life after conversion. And give thanks to God for his grace.

Leaders: feel free to be selective and creative with your use of these notes.

Don't feel you have to use all of the material, but
do try to keep the shape of Review – Read – Reflect – Respond
and *DO make room for the 'And Finally' questions!*

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Included in Paul's conversion is his being filled with the Holy Spirit and his baptism.

- Why are they important?

Calling

The first calling on all Christians is to follow Jesus (eg Mark 1:18) and to be his witnesses, in the power of the Holy Spirit (eg Acts 1:8).

- How can remembering this primary calling on our lives help us to avoid following Paul's pre-conversion attempts to gain righteousness from what we do (for him, by keeping the Law)?

Paul couldn't help himself: once he had encountered Jesus he had to tell others, starting with his fellow Jews in both Damascus and Jerusalem. We often find it hard to witness to those we know best, those on our frontlines.

- Why do you think this is and how can we encourage one another? Remember the importance of the Holy Spirit in Acts 1:8. Also remember that we need to tell the story of our ongoing, often ordinary encounters with our extraordinary Saviour and Lord and how he continues to miraculously transform our lives.

Paul also received a very specific calling to witness to the Gentiles (non-Jews) and their kings and to the people of Israel.

- How do you (or could you) know what God's specific calling is to you?
- Does this excite you or frighten you? Pray for one another in this.

Paul was equipped for this work of service before he was even converted by his knowledge of the Jewish Law and having been born in a Gentile city.

- How has God equipped you for callings he has given you in the past or the present?

Church Community

Paul's transformation comes through his conversion and his calling, but it also comes through the community of Christians. He set out to destroy the followers of The Way, but his experience of Jesus resulted in him joining them.

- Ananias welcomed Paul into the family which is the Christian community by his greeting ('Brother Saul') and baptism, as well as helping Paul to physical and spiritual healing and to receive the Holy Spirit.
 - How can we at TBC better welcome and support new Christians and those who are new amongst us? Ask yourself, 'What part can I play in that?'
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- The Christian community can, sadly, be a place where people feel judged and rejected. Paul knew this and relied on Barnabas to speak up for him and encourage him.

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- Give examples of times when you have been grateful for a 'Barnabas' in your life.
 - What characteristics do we each need to take the role of Barnabas in our part of the Christian family?
- There are many unnamed Christians in Acts 9 who cared for Paul, helping him to escape from danger.
 - Can you suggest ways in which we can better care for one another?

And finally:

As you conclude, ask each person:

- What is the main thing you are taking away as an action point?
- How can we pray for you?
- Is there anything we can check on next time we meet?

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