

New Kilpatrick

Podcast

13th June 2021

Acts 9:1-19

Welcome

Hello! Thank you for the invitation to accompany you today on the journey, and on a journey we are. Some of us are learning to do that again: travel beyond the local circle of our neighbourhood. Have you got a mask, hand sanitiser, and remember to meet outside when you can: it's quite a strict list in our house

The faith story we tell today is also a journey, it's not local, no masks, sanitiser, social distancing rules apply, but Saul discovers he is quite vulnerable. He's between places in so many ways, his own tradition and this new version called the Way, between Jerusalem and Damascus, when everything comes to a head. And you can't help but feel for Paul on that road to Damascus. What was he wrestling with about what to cling to, and what to let go? What has happening to his belief system?

Which might have us thinking: what do we cling too and what do we let go? How do we describe and speak and experience our faith? Welcome to the journey today

Prayer

Spirit
In the language of faith
Which is never adequate
May we pause in the silence
And simply wait on you

(Pause)

Make space for encounter

Give breath to your imagination

Move into your presence

(Pause)

Spirit
In the between places in life
The journeys
The travel from one thing to the next
From today into tomorrow
From pandemic to a greater balance
From anger to peace

May we meet you
And be ready
For you to change us
Transform who we are
Closer to the folk you long us to be

In these moments of encounter
May we let go that which we have been carrying too long
Which is too hurtful
Too painful
Too limiting
And let the scales fall
That we might see the person you love
Renewed
Reborn
Resurrected
Through forgiveness
And into life

A turning round
A facing new direction
An invitation into life renewed
A promise given
And we give thanks
And journey on

With you

Spirit
Muse
Companion on the way

Hear us as we say together
The global prayer

Our Father, who is in heaven,
Hallowed by your name;
Your kingdom come;
Your will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For yours is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever.
Amen

Reading Intro

There are two parts to the story today that come together. One is about Saul and his conversion, and the other is about Ananias (a different Ananias from last week). We hear them read by different voices, two separate events that find themselves unexpectedly coming together. So to begin with let us imagine ourselves beyond our homes and town and in the wild somewhere, where there are rocks and heat and a roadway on which we walk with a few companions...

Reading 1

Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. ³ Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" ⁵ He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶ But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." ⁷ The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. ⁸ Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. ⁹ For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Bridge

Now what is going on here? What just happened? An unexpected, out of the blue conversion or something deeper that has been going on in Saul for some time? But that's not the end of the story. He's had some deep physical reaction to this moment and he is in shock. It's a moment of crisis.

But at the same time, in Damascus, in the middle of town, Ananias is hearing God's voice too, requesting him, to do something unexpected: to meet Saul, chief persecutor of The Way, the Jesus-followers. Clearly, he wrestles with this, questions God's motivation. He has a healthy relationship with the Almighty. So we are now back in town and here's his side of the event.

Reading 2

¹⁰ Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." He answered, "Here I am, Lord." ¹¹ The Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, ¹² and he has seen in a vision^[a] a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." ¹³ But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; ¹⁴ and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name." ¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; ¹⁶ I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." ¹⁷ So Ananias went and

entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul^[b] and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” ¹⁸ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, ¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength. For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus.

Reflection

There are some stories in the Bible... I wished would happen to people today... I wish some of our global and national leaders would have a Damascus moment... especially with the UK Aid budget, or tax on multinationals... I know there has been some shift on the latter but it isn't as good as the headlines make out... I also know that is an arrogant position and completely from my perspective... why should a Damascus road experience only favour my politics or theology...

The experience Paul had... well... maybe it was less about a moment of revelation... but a messy process that comes when you grow out of a crisis...

Certainly we like a story that is a confidence booster... Chief prosecutor turned chief advocate... and while that does happen... “Yes, Christianity has still got it in itself to change people”, it doesn't happen like that very often... We make a point of this story because great conversions like this aren't typical... It's more messy...

Perhaps Saul was already on the way towards christianity. He was actually quite attracted to it, but couldn't admit it, and so persecuted it all the more in order to dull his own feelings towards, it until he could take it no longer, and this living a lie, almost, built up to some crisis, breakdown, turning moment, when he admitted to himself he was siding with the “enemy”.

We know this happens to us all: publicly we are one thing but underneath we believe another, and sometimes we can hide it, but sometimes it becomes too much, and we have a crisis. And it becomes a bit messy as we grow out of it into the new person...

And I wonder if that interpretation helps us today in the church and in our communities and society... as we grow out of pandemics... finding a new way... The whole conversion idea is that we are becoming something... It is a process... and faith is as much like that as society...

If you read about Paul's conversion... you have a choice of three in Acts... each different... then there are a few of Paul's own retellings, different again, and how he writes of it in his letters, different once more. For him, it was a process that ripped through Paul and continued to do so.

And it isn't difficult to reflect on the same process in the church. It is, actually, what ought to happen to this collective body of God's people, we are, as the church, continually being converted, continually responding to context, to new experiences of new crises.

We are a living organism. We are Paul, and scales fall from our eyes often as we realise a different response is now necessary, a conversion. Which makes church life kind of difficult, restless, unsettling. It is pains-taking and labour intensive but that was the world

of earliest Christianity. We're not exactly set up to be converted. That's what we are meant to do to everyone else, but here is Paul, and his continual conversion.

As a church, as a society, we're at that crisis, that moment of truth, and the road will be turbulent and unstable, but that was the early church. Paul, living into his conversion and calling, didn't build massive empires, or congregations, he lived in community, small group all of which maintained a dizzying variety of theologies and ideas, and the experience was often turbulent and unstable.

And there, perhaps is our future for some time. We will become church in this age, as we have always done. Our latest conversion will be a process out of this crisis, but like Paul then, the love in which they put their faith, and the God in which they centred their lives, made a way for these fragile communities even when there seemed to be no way.

Caught between a personal conversion experience and the growing life together in Christ... the church found a way, and perhaps, we find ourselves now in that messy, yet faithful, turbulent yet trusting, critical yet awakening place, of becoming church, which is where we find Saul, renamed Paul... and a new way if seeing life

Reading

For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, ²⁰ and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." ²¹ All who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem among those who invoked this name? And has he not come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?" ²² Saul became increasingly more powerful and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Messiah.

Prayer

Creating God
Word of transformation
Promise of renewal
We pray
We gather here, and pray
Pausing with the world
And drawing ourselves towards it
And meeting you in it

Where G7 leaders meet
And a world that needs justice
In tax
In trade
In vaccines
In ethics
In development aid
In basic humanity
And we pause hardly believing
We still need to work for these
That these are not already a given

So may we transform our living here
To be a model for the world
Where we decide to live in ways
Leaders find it so hard to make possible

May we meet you in the world
Of multi nationals and ultra-rich
And desperate poverty and daily disease
And, with you, wonder why
There is our prayer

May we meet you in the world
Of Tigray and Mali
Of Nicaragua and Syria
Of Palestine/Israel and Yemen
Where conflict ruins life and futures
And so much pain seems unfelt by power
This is our prayer

May we meet you in the world
Of pandemics and uncertainty
Of job fears and education
Of the youngest hardest hit

May we meet you in the world
Where climate is changing
Water is scarce and weather unpredictable
Praying for a generation to move us all
Towards a deeper love and value for creation

For our local parish
Our neighbourhoods and neighbours
Our families and friends
For those who are physically and mentally ill right now
Grieving right now
Hurting right now
Anxious right now
May we meet you in this world
And be companions in the love
The transformation
The conversion we all need

So be it
Amen

Benediction

May we go into the world
And in all that is messy and turbulent
Live in resurrection promise

And the grace...

News

As always, thank you for inviting us to join you. Please do join us online if you can at nkchurch.org.uk which is our portal to all things New Kilpatrick at the moment, though the sanctuary service is at 10.30 and to book a place phone 0141 942 8827 no later than the Thursday evening before the Sunday you wish to attend.

Otherwise we're on zoom with quiz night Tuesday, sofa surfers with Freedom Bakery on Thursday, coffee pot Friday. Bulletin too each week which can be subscribed to or downloaded from the website.

So in whatever way we can connect with each other I hope you have a good week and please still take good care of each other and see you soon everyone.