

Sunday 26th January – The Conversion of Paul
3rd Sunday of Epiphany (CW), 3rd Sunday after Epiphany
(BCP)

Jeremiah 1.4-10; Acts 9.1-22; Matthew 19.27-30

Dear Friends,

The bible has many stories showing the different ways in which people are called by God. The boy Samuel was called by the voice of God, helped by Eli the priest to recognise that voice. Philip was called personally by Jesus; Nathanael was called by Philip, who on meeting Jesus, declared Him to be the Son of God. God calls us individually, but it is still up to us to open up our whole beings in order to recognise and respond to that call. We have nothing to fear because God will work with us, for He knows us better than we know ourselves.

Saul was a prime instigator of the stoning of the Martyr Stephen: Saul sought to stamp out the earliest Church. Saul was one of the zealous young men, blind to anything which contradicted their world view. Saul set out from Jerusalem to Damascus to arrest those he believed to be heretics and to them bring them back as prisoners, for trial, and possibly execution. On this road, Saul has a personal encounter with Christ, to be commissioned by Christ for mission. The experience leaves Saul temporarily blinded: God calls the faithful Ananias to restore Saul through prayer and baptism. Amazing Grace!

In and through his conversion experience, Saul died completely to the person he was previously such that we might say that he was resurrected to a new life *in Christ*. Saul become Paul, the Apostle, taking the Christian message to the Gentiles, founding churches, writing key letters which become a very substantial part of the New Testament. The conversion of Paul, therefore, demonstrates that in the economy of God no one is beyond redemption and conversion.

On that different Road to Emmaus two fugitive disciples experienced their Epiphany moment. Here there was no flash of light as Saul experienced. Christ simply walked alongside the disciples until they were ready to see Jesus in the breaking of the bread. Encounters with God are not necessarily a one-off experience. Much more common is the 'walking with' God. However, each and every encounter is, part of a process of change ~ *metanoia* – a change of heart. A true encounter with God, each Epiphany moment, in whatever form it takes, is only the start of a much more remarkable journey which lasts our whole lifetime and beyond,

and, in which, our submission to God is a moment-by-moment experience to be marvelled at, for it leads us from one degree of glory to another. Amen.