

Change of Heart and Mind  
Sermon on Paul's Conversion  
First Church Westfield  
May 5, 2019

When we talk about the conversion of Saul to Paul, we typically are thinking of who he was before and who he became after that conversion. I'd like to focus with you this morning on the days that were in between Saul's being struck by a "great light" and "something like scales" falling from Paul's eyes. He was a new creature in that moment. But he was also the same. He had vision and purpose before and he had vision and purpose after. But the days in between the two were clouded with uncertainty and darkness. Those in-between days had to have been difficult. Let's break it down.

Saul was on his way to Damascus to arrest any Christians that were in the synagogues. They didn't have a welcome like we do here. If you were considered a Christian (who may or may not have been a Jew) you were not welcome in a Jewish house of worship. He was well known throughout the land. He loved killing Christians; he was passionate and unrelenting about his task as a persecutor of the followers of Jesus, even though Jesus himself was Jewish. Saul was powerful and full of rage. He acted on his own. He didn't need anyone or anything to tell him what to do or how to do it. It's great to know what to do and how to do things in life. If you have a task and you are clear about what is required, and, especially if you have some experience thrown in, you're on top of your game. I'm sure understand this. "Git 'er done," is the attitude and the approach. You have all you need. Then something happens that throws you off your horse, maybe not as dramatic as Saul's experience, but for you, it's a big deal.

Saul fell to the ground. This is significant. Whenever anyone falls to the ground there's big trouble. Not only can you get hurt, but falling indicates a lack of balance, trouble navigating, a shift in what's possible for you and your future. How many have felt knocked to the ground by an occurrence in your life? How many have literally fell to the ground? Then you know exactly what I'm talking about. There are many thoughts that tumble through your head along with your body. What will become

of me? How will I survive? Make a living? Be the same person? On and on the litany goes... Saul falls to the ground indicating that everything he's done before is called into the question. Everything that has worked in the past probably is not going to work for him now. And then, something even more dreaded:

Saul was struck blind. What are some synonyms for blindness? Darkness. Confusion. Terror. Total dependence. What a devastating blow it must have been for the "great and powerful Saul" to have to depend on the kindness of strangers! How many tough independents do we have here? What is the prospect like of being dependent on others? Not too happy, I'm thinking. *I can do all things myself*, seems to be the operating theme of your life. I'm sure this was true of Saul. Later, Saul (who is now Paul in Philippians 4:13) says, "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength." But not now, Saul is in a period of waiting. He has no idea what will happen to him next. It was a humbling experience.

For three days (a common time frame, second only to 40 days) Saul has to stay with strangers and be totally dependent. He doesn't eat. He doesn't drink. He can't see. He can't watch TV. He can't read. I'm imagining that he did some praying. Maybe someone took him out for a walk in the garden. Maybe he listened to birds, to the wind, to a nearby harp or lyre. But mostly he just sat there and allowed himself to be confused, to not know, and to trust in God.

Periods of darkness are nothing new. But when periods of darkness hit you as an individual, it's like you're the only one. We know this is not true, but try telling that to someone who has lost his job, has a life-threatening illness, or is facing the loss of someone who is near and dear to her heart. It's not easy to not know. It's not easy to depend on others. And it's certainly not easy to have to slow down or do nothing or do something very unfamiliar. These days of waiting, blindness and not knowing are not easy, to say the least.

Can we learn anything from Saul's conversion? Is there anything here for you and me today? Maybe we can look to the end for hope. Scales fall from the eyes. Vision becomes clear. Strength is renewed and the way forward seems totally possible. Joy and purpose return. Look to the end

of Paul's experience if you encounter one of these periods of darkness and waiting. For a change of mind and heart, you and I must learn to lean on each other and simply affirm our faith as we face an uncertain future. Scales will fall. Purpose will return. Love will win the day. Let others help you. Count on God, the Way, the Truth and the Light. The three days will end (however long they take), and resurrection will shine away the darkness.