

# WEEKLY SERMON

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## Surprised by God

This week saw the festival of the Conversion of St Paul.

Who was Paul, and why is this day such an important festival?

We first hear about Paul when he was called Saul. He was present when Stephen, the first Christian martyr, was stoned. We are told that Saul looked after the people's cloaks whilst they stoned Stephen.

He was obviously not a follower of Christianity. Most likely he delighted in this horrible spectacle of one of the prominent 'followers of The Way' being put to death.

Some years later Saul was still persecuting the new Christians and he went to the high priests in Damascus to ask for letters to allow him to arrest any followers of The Way and take them to Jerusalem.

In the Book of Acts we hear how his plans were thwarted - big time! On his journey as he was travelling along the Damascus Road he met with an unexpected and inexplicable incident.

A bright light from heaven; Jesus speaking to him and then when he opened his eyes, he was blind! Three days later his sight was restored, he was himself baptised as a follower of Christ and he began to preach in the Synagogues that Jesus was the Son of God.

You can read the full story in Acts Chapter 9. No other conversion in the Bible is so dramatic or so well attested.

This event from more than 2000 years ago is still important to us today. Paul, probably more than anyone else, is responsible for spreading Christianity beyond the Jews. He supported the early churches by letter and by visits. Paul knew how to tell the story of Jesus so that people would understand.

He travelled by land and sea; he healed and he preached and he wrote. He wrote letters of encouragement to the early churches; he gave them information, helped them to make wise decisions and always he promised them of the love of God and of his prayer and care for them.

God still calls people today. Not always as dramatically as Paul's experience on the Damascus road, but nevertheless he calls people in all sorts of ways to do a myriad of roles.

Some are called to ordination to serve the church and the people in that particular way, but many more are called to live out their Christian lives as lay people.

HEALTHY CHURCHES TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES

Maybe that is with a calling to spread the Good News of Jesus in a particular place, which might be their local community or many miles away across continents. Or those who are called may be active in challenging some of the problems which face the world today.

But wherever people they have one thing in common ... they are called they use their time and talents to make Christ known and share God's love with those whom they meet.

You may think that God will never call you or you couldn't possibly fulfil that calling if He did? But who would have thought that one of the chief persecutors of the early church, someone who would deliberately seek out Christians in order to do them harm, would become the founder of so many new churches?

God calls ordinary people to do extraordinary things for him. If you listen and hear his call on your life, he will walk alongside you in your calling and enable you to do extraordinary things for him. So as you go about your daily lives, look for God in the unexpected places, and maybe like Paul you will be surprised by a call from God which will bring new and exciting challenges.

**Rev Carole Garner, Parish of Oswaldtwistle**