

“What’s Happened to You? The Power of Transformation!”

By Steve Ramer, Pastor

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Paul’s Conversion and the Power to Change

Scripture

Acts 9:10-18

Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." He answered, "Here I am, Lord." 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, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight."

But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name." 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; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."

So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul 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." And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored.

Sermon

“What’s Happened to You?” song by The Call

What's happened to you
You used to be so shy
You used to hang your head down
You wouldn't look in my eyes
Did you see some great vision
Did you finally break through
Did you shake the foundations
What's happened to you
la la la...

What's happened to you
You used to look so tired

Now there's a spring in your step
And your words are on fire
Did you hear some great secret
Did the words ring of truth
Did you rise from the ashes
What's happened to you

Where the four winds meet
The world is so still
The waves are not pounding
And the hungry are filled
Our shadows have crossed here
Where the sun touched the ground
The gathered are singing
what a beautiful sound
They're singing
la la la...

What's happened to you
You used to be so unkind
You used to curse at this poor world
So what changed your mind
What stirred such compassion
Is a mystery to me
I don't know what's happened
Oh, but I like what I see

Now I have been after Cathy and Saja
to perform that song for quite a long time.

I feel it sums up well, in simple,
yet profound terms the power of transformation.

When I asked Cathy what she thought the song was about
she simply used the word, "conversion."

The Bible is filled with stories about transformations
and yet none is more powerful, or perhaps represents better,
a dramatic 180-degree turn like the conversion of Paul.

Most of us know the story of the Apostle Paul.
Originally known as Saul, he became one of the most avid
and enthusiastic persecutors of those first followers of Jesus.
But while enroute to the city of Damascus, on an explicit mission,

to capture and persecute the community of believers there,
he was struck by temporary blindness.

From out of nowhere, the blinding light the voice of God thundered,
“Saul, Saul why do you persecute me!”

What we read this morning was what came next --
his healing and conversion by Ananias.

Upon regaining his sight, Saul changed his name to Paul
and became a follower of Jesus.

He also became an indefatigable evangelist
for the very embryonic faith he had once harshly persecuted.
Not only did the church’s spread throughout the Mediterranean
owe much of its success to Paul but he also became
one of the major authors of the New Testament.

But I think we all likely know of someone
or perhaps know a similar story about such a person
who too has made a hard 180 in their life -
a radical change that warrants the astonished refrain,
“What’s has happened to you?”

Maybe it is someone who has miraculously put aside bigotry, hatred
and bitterness to embrace and forgive others?
Maybe it’s someone who has replaced harshness
and anger with deep joy and gentleness.
Or it could be a painfully shy one who now speaks prophetically
and who stands up for justice?
Or perhaps a hopeless cynic who now gushes forth
in gratitude and love for all that God has created.

We find it hard to express fully this change and
we use lots of words to try and encapsulate it.
Words like: conversion, transformation, salvation,
and apropos for this time of year, metamorphoses.

Each speaks of a reality of not just change but dramatic change,
a radical turning that now goes in a wholly new direction.
These events are most definitely the artwork of God’s Holy Spirit
and an expression of the immensity of the Spirit’s power.

But let me remind you again that we are in the season called Pentecost and therefore, the power is currently available to all of us.

Last week I used images of crash helmets and heavy quilts to try and explain the wide expanse of how the Holy Spirit comes.

Literally, for those of you who weren't here, we strapped on our helmets and some of us snuggled under blankets as we awaited the Spirit's movement in our lives.

At times we do need the safe, warm comfort of an old quilt to crawl under - a place of protection from a hostile world, or maybe like Saul, a safe place to begin our healing?

At other times we are better off strapping our helmets on tightly as the same Spirit tightens our parachute to our backs and pushes us out of the airplane.

It's also comforting to know that it is the Spirit who is totally adept at knowing exactly what kind of gear we will really need.

Most of the time our job is to merely get into sync, knowing when to raise our hands in the air like we just don't care, and when to grab on tightly to lap bars of the rollercoaster.

But make no mistake about it folks, the ride has the power to radically turn you upside down and change your life. And whether the journey is climbing a mountain, or walking along a gently gurgling stream, or stopping awhile to watch a butterfly float lightly above some flowers - or sitting with another in their pain or grief - the journey can radically change who you are, changing you into that which the Divine Lover wants you to be.

It is the power to change, to go in an opposite direction, or to boldly go where you have never been before. It is the same power that gave the Apostle Paul new insight and courage to follow the one whom he had set out to persecute. It is the same power we have seen and heard about radically saving and changing the lives of those around us. And it is also, especially, the same power that is always surrounding me and that can change even me.

For you see, I think, that the real power in observing the dramatic change in those around us, comes from the inspiration they give us that we too are able to change.

That the same power that saved and changed them can also change us in similarly dramatic ways.

It is possible my sisters and brothers, for you and me, to be converted, saved, and metamorphosed into new people.

It takes, as I mentioned earlier, getting in sync with the Spirit, or at least a willingness to trust the Spirit as she starts strapping us into our seats or grabbing our security blanket when he holds it out for us.

Change is gonna come folks, take that to the bank! Journeying with the Spirit, in fact, is a whole lifetime's worth of change and growth. It is in fact what we were created for.

Changes that sometimes, in the moment, may seem indiscernible, while at other times will intimidate and likely scare the bejeezus out of you!

There will also be times of radical metamorphoses that bring sweet comfort and calm.

But in either case these will be whole and complete conversions that too may cause those who we meet along the trail to exclaim, **"What's Happened to You?!"**

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