

Third Sunday of Easter  
Year C

Acts 9:1-20  
Psalm 30  
Revelation 5:11-14  
John 21:1-19

Paul's experience on the road to Damascus is not one that I can relate to. I am sure that most of us would agree with Betty when she says that she cannot remember a time when she was not a believer in Jesus. Dramatic conversion stories like Paul are not very common today and were not in biblical times, either. It is noteworthy precisely because it is not normal.

As we read this account in the ninth chapter of Acts, we see an unexpected encounter between the chief persecutor of the early church and the risen Jesus. We tend to focus on Saul/Paul because of the impact he had on the growth of the church in the first century. But, he is not the central character in the story. We hear he falls to the ground when confronted by a great light. This is very similar to the experience the prophet Ezekiel had. We also hear that Saul/Paul fell from his horse, but I have never run across a version of this incident in any Bible that says anything about a horse. There is just as good a claim that he was walking and fell to the ground. However he was traveling, we know Saul/Paul was greatly impacted by this experience.

Like Mary at the tomb, he did not recognize the voice. Granted, Saul was never a disciple of Jesus and may have actually been too young to have known Jesus prior to the Resurrection. Hence, he asked who it was with whom he was having this encounter. Given his knowledge of scripture, Saul would have suspected that it might be God.

Much has been made of Saul's blindness and his fasting for three days. The symbolism of blindness is very evident in the Gospels and almost every commentator has to remark on the three days equally the time between the crucifixion and the resurrection. But, that puts the focus on Saul. He is not the most important figure in this story. Who is, then?

God is the central character in this story. It is God who calls us and it is God who changes our lives. Perhaps this story about Saul is so meaningful because of the dramatic nature of the change wrought in him. He began the story as the chief persecutor of the church and ends the story as the great evangelist who brought the message to the Europeans. This was never Saul's idea - it was the work of God.

Another person in the story experienced a major change in his life - Ananias. When God called him to go and pray with Saul, Ananias was fearful. He had heard about this man and knew the danger he had posed to believers. But, God changed the mind of Ananias and used him as an instrument of God's grace. Throughout scripture, God is an agent of change.

This is a work that God has not ended. God still changes people today. We all know the expression, "It is hard to teach an old dog new tricks," but God has been doing that throughout history. We can look around us and see how God has changed the lives of people we know. The

change we see might not be as dramatic as the change in Saul's life, but it can be as significant. Whether it is healing someone from cancer, helping them overcome an addiction, or just nudging them into a new career, God is in the change business. But, God does not work alone.

There is a passage in Paul's letter to the Romans that explains how God uses people. It says, "But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?" In our Baptism, we are the ones who are sent to proclaim the Good News of God so others might believe.

How do we do that proclaiming? Through our actions and our words. By letting people see in us the love of God for all people. Saul was not changed into Paul so that he would stop persecuting the church. God changed him so that he might spread the message of God's love to Europe and beyond. People saw the change in him and believed in the power of God. People see the change in us and seek to know how we changed. That is our opportunity to spread God's message - by telling our story even as Paul told his.

Let us join God in being change agents today.