

Feast of the Conversion of Paul – 25th Jan 2026

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts...

The conversion of Saul / Saint Paul was not a simple story...

When our Lord Jesus, the Messiah, had been crucified, the expectations by the Jewish hierarchy had been that His scruffy followers would scatter to the four winds – and that should have been the end of it all...

But it wasn't...

If you can successfully pick off the leaders, one by one, eventually the heresy will die...

At least that was the Jewish leaders' operating mode.

Face it... Young Saul had a nasty streak, plain and simple. He had set a personal goal for himself to totally eradicate any memory of Jesus and his disciples.

Saul was a Pharisee, a group that was known for its strict adherence to the Talmud and the oral Jewish traditions. To them, heretics were unworthy of living because they caused great difficulties within Jewish communities and could potentially lead their people away from God.

The Jewish courts of justice, however, never doled out the actual punishment *themselves* in cases of heresy; those honors were left to the judgment of the community – via mob justice.

To Saul, Jesus had been just another run-of-the-mill heretic. A charismatic, and perhaps convincing one, but a dangerous heretic, nonetheless. A troublemaker and a threat to society in Jerusalem.

The numbers of disciples of Jesus had been growing rapidly, despite Him having been horrendously executed by the Romans – to dissuade rebellion, and to sow fear amongst any followers.

Saul didn't do any of the strong-arm stuff himself. No, that wasn't his style. He had others who did his dirty work for him. Saul was the "brains" behind the agenda.

When the disciple Stephen had been dragged out into the street to be stoned to death, Saul simply stood back and callously watched as dozens of local men heaved rocks at Stephen until his broken body was lifeless.

Saul had closed his ears and his mind to the words of the Holy Spirit that had been coming from the mouth of Stephen.

Saul was breathing out murderous threats against the disciples of the Lord. He had approached the high priest and requested letters to the synagogues in Damascus, such that, if he found any men or women belonging to the cult, Saul and his colleagues could bring them as *prisoners* back to Jerusalem – to be dealt with “properly”.

Saul's sole mission in life at that point was to “kill”, to obliterate the troublesome Jesus Movement. Once and for all.

But, as Saul was on his way to Damascus, a blinding light had thrown him to the ground and taken away his sight.

Then Saul heard a voice in the Hebrew language...

“Saul, Saul! Why do you persecute Me??”

“You injure yourself by kicking the goad.”

Saul answered, “Lord, who ARE you?!?”

And the Lord answered, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting”

So, the phrase “kicking the goad” caught my attention.

A goad is a heavy, pointed staff used by shepherds and cattlemen to prod their stubborn livestock in the flanks to get them to go wherever the master wished. Think oxen, rams, donkeys...

Kicking or lashing out at the goad was an animal’s way of fighting back against its master’s desires.

Jesus does the same to us from time to time, and not always subtly – as with Saul.

Pay attention!! You're not listening!! You are being stubborn!

After Saul had been disabled, knocked off his high horse – so to speak, the Lord chose Ananias to go to the house of Judas and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul.

Ananias said, "seriously?!? That man has been hunting down and arresting your followers, watching them being put to death, and **you** want **me** to go find him and do **what!?!?**"

“Go!” Ananias heard. “This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings”

So, with great trepidation, Ananias did as the Lord had asked. He went to the house where Saul was waiting, placed his hands upon his head, prayed over him, and Saul’s vision was restored.

So, what **did** Jesus see in Saul?

Why did he choose a man with such a negative attitude and personality?

On the surface, Saul might seem to us a strongly undesirable candidate to be chosen to do Jesus' work, but God doesn't usually choose people based upon our criteria. God is a much better judge of character than we are.

Saul had been raised among Greek-speaking Jews in present day Turkey, in the city of Tarsus. He was highly educated in the Talmud; he had Roman citizenship; he was uniquely qualified to move amongst the Gentile communities.

Saul spoke Latin due, in part, to the Roman occupation. He knew Hebrew from his studies of scripture, and he also spoke Aramaic which was the primary language of the majority of peoples in Syria, Turkey, Lebanon and Palestine.

His strength of commitment, his passion, and his powers of communication, both written and oral, were all uniquely valuable to God's purpose of spreading the Gospel of His Son.

But honestly? That's not where my heart is this morning...

Remember Ananias? I am feeling a lot like Ananias just now.

There are far too many "old" Sauls out there right now for my comfort. I suspect that you might be feeling just about the same.

And, sadly, it's nothing new in America, is it?

Just this past Monday, we celebrated the ministry and passion of Reverend Dr Martin Luther King. His “I have a Dream” speech delivered in 1963 on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC to an audience of over 250,000.

His Civil Rights march from Selma to Montgomery Alabama in 1965 across the Edmund Pettus Bridge on Bloody Sunday.

And his assassination in Memphis, TN, in April of 1968. Because “certain” people were afraid of his message.

I am mourning the murder of Renee Nicole Good in Minneapolis by an ICE agent. A kind, gentle voice snuffed out in a moment of rage.

And again, just yesterday, in Minneapolis, Alex Pretti, a VA nurse who cared for our veterans, was assassinated while defending a woman from pepper spray.

Assassinations. Assassinations hoping to take away the voices of these people and of so many others who have **dared** to speak the truth.

My heart is heavy with what has been happening to people who simply “look different” from the rest of us. Brutal arrests without cause, and **if** they are eventually released, it is without an utterance of any apology.

I have a young friend who was born in Malaysia. She, her husband, their two daughters, and their son live in South Seattle.

She is particularly vocal on social media in her feelings about what has been going on in Palestine and especially in Gaza where she has family. She has no love lost for our politicians. Very clearly.

ICE has been making an increasing appearance in her Seattle neighborhood, forcing a half dozen schools to close their doors and into “shelter-in-place” protocol for safety this past week.

I worry about her safety pretty much every day.

This shouldn't be happening in America. Plain and simple.

Thousands of people in our nation are suffering because they don't fit into someone else's rigid image of what an American should look like...

We are grieving – and now is **not** the time to remain Silent.

We cannot remain Silent. We must not!

It is **not** what Jesus would have us do.

It is **not** what Jesus would have done.

It is **not** what St. Paul would have done.

The Word of the Lord shall **not** be silenced by mere mortals.