

Life Group Sheet Week beginning 27 January 2019

THE CONVERSION OF PAUL

We are still in the season of Epiphany, which means 'a moment of sudden revelation or insight', when God 'breaks in'. If possible, look at Caravaggio's painting in

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conversion_on_the_Way_to_Damascus

- What does this startling painting by Caravaggio communicate about the events described in Acts 9.1-8, and again, by Paul, in Acts 26.12-16?
- Now look at 1 Corinthians 9.1, 15.3-8. Because of what Paul says to the Corinthians, John Pollock, in 'The Apostle A Life of Paul', describes Paul's experience like this:

Paul remained prostrate. For him alone the light grew in intensity. He heard a voice, at once calm and authoritative, say in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?' He looked up. Within the centre of light, which blinded him from his surroundings, he faced a Man of about his own age. Paul could not believe what he heard and saw. All his convictions, intellect and training, his reputation, his self-respect, demanded that Jesus should not be alive again. He played for time and replied, 'Who are you, Lord?' He was using a mode of address that might mean simply 'Your honour'. 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you, this kicking against the goad.'

*Then Paul knew. In a second that seemed an eternity he saw the wounds in Jesus' hands and feet, saw the face, and knew he had seen the Lord, that he was alive, as Stephen and the others had said, and that he loved not only those whom Paul persecuted but also **Paul** himself. 'It is hard for **you** to kick against the goad.' Not one word of reproach.*

This reimagining is based on Paul saying he **saw** Jesus. It helps convey the wonder and suddenness of his 'conversion', and how completely it turned his religious and intellectual world upside down.

- How does this compare with the way you came to faith? Did you 'see the light'? For many people it is a much more gradual and gentle journey. Have you reached a 'moment of truth'?
- Either way, bearing in mind that 'conversion' means turning round and facing the other way, what things you believed before has it meant discarding?
- Now read Acts 9. 9-22. It is ironic that Paul's great illumination begins with three days of blindness. Why might that be?
- What do you think about Ananias' role in the next part of the story? What can we learn from him?
- Paul is galvanised into action. How easy or difficult do you find it to share your faith? Share some ways of doing this with one another. You might like to act out a situation, in pairs, or put someone brave in the hot seat and question them about their faith.
- Pray! Thank God for the ways in which he has revealed himself to you and brought you to faith. Pray for one another, maybe in pairs, to be enabled to share your faith appropriately, and in obedience to the Holy Spirit.

'THE APOSTLE A Life of Paul' by John Pollock is highly recommended. It's available from the Lyttelton Well Bookshop, or you can borrow my copy (Heather).