

Preaching Christ....
...by the power of the Holy Spirit
...and the authority of the Word of God

Date: 17 July 2022
Services: *Across the Diocese*
Series: New beginnings
Title: Saul Converted
Passage: Acts 9:1-31
Outline:

1. The man meets the Messiah
 2. The persecutor meets the Persecuted
 3. The arrestor, arrested
-

We are in love with renovation!!!!

Look at the programmes on TV..... the old house is reno-ed, the overweight person is reno-ed to a better skinny version of themselves and the kitchen cook is reno-ed into a Masterchef able to pull off the greatest of feats in the smallest window of time.

We love the before and after photos, the oohs and the ahhs. //

This series on Acts that we finish today has been all about renovation!!!! It is an account of how the **power** of the resurrected Jesus **exploded**.....

..... and **engulfed Jerusalem** and the **surrounding areas** as people believed that **Jesus**, the one who was recently crucified, was indeed **alive again**

...and **that** knowledge, when understood, had the power to **renovate people** and **communities**.

Here we see the power of the **resurrected Jesus** giving birth to the **church!!**

And **that** church has been **protected** by that **same power** throughout **time**....

...and brought our diocese through the **challenges** and **sadness** of the past couple of **decades** – through the controversies of the past.... to our present point... we are keen to become inspired and equipped – **to share Jesus for life**.

One can't help but feel the **energy** behind Luke's account of these early days.

Preaching Christ....
...by the power of the Holy Spirit
...and the authority of the Word of God

Christianity is on the rise, the influence of the Christ is strong and His converts..... his renovated repentant people.... unbending in their dedication to him and his church.
///

Last week we were rejoicing as the **scattered** church **spread** the news of **Jesus**....

The persecution **itself**... used by **God** to get the Good News moving out from **Jerusalem** to the ends of **the world** – just had been **commanded**.... ///

And then from that **high** at the end of chapter 8, as all this great stuff is happening, Luke redirects our attention.....

...have a look with me – ch 9 v1 – Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples...

As **Christianity** grew // so did the **haters**. //

Persecution raised its ugly head and Dr Luke brings out of the wings // the ever present, lurking, anti-Christian, murdering, fanatical terrorist, “Saul of Tarsus” into the spot light (so to speak)

Again – from v1 - He went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

Letters so that he could claim authority from a higher power than himself... the **high priest** no less! //

Notice the name given to the Christians at this point? *If he found any belonging to the ‘**the Way**’!*

What a great name for those who followed Jesus who proclaimed “I am the Way.... //

Saul was a like a wild boar in a vineyard, rooting up the vines - totally out of control fuelled by anger. /

And so Saul sets out for Damascus (c200km).

Here’s where we are heading this morning as we look at this unlikely conversion:

**Preaching Christ....
...by the power of the Holy Spirit
...and the authority of the Word of God**

- 1. The man meets the Messiah**
- 2. The persecutor meets the Persecuted**
- 3. The arrestor, arrested**

1. The man meets the Messiah

Saul had waged war on the Christian Church!!!

Little did he know he had waged war on the very Messiah whom he, as a devout Jew, had been waiting for.

3 As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" 5 "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. 6 "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

I know little about war and war manoeuvres but I DO know the best tactic is to know your enemy!!!

Saul failed in his market research!!! He did not know whom he was up against!

For he wasn't against Jesus' **people** – he was actually up against **Jesus himself!** /

And to be worthy opponent he would have to have gone into training.

Maybe he could have started on the sea of Galilee and practiced calming the wind and the waves....

And when he had achieved this he might have climbed mount Horeb and worked at commanding the sun to set in the morning and rise in the evening.....

And having conquered that miracle he could have visited the cemeteries and tried raising the dead!

And when he had mastered all these domains he may have proven himself **worthy** of this **war!**

BUT Jesus simply **SPEAKS** to Saul and Saul's reaction is to fall down as if dead with his face in the dirt!!

**Preaching Christ....
...by the power of the Holy Spirit
...and the authority of the Word of God**

He is **NO match** in this **battle!** //

ASIDE: Friends, if I had a dollar for everyone who said to me “If only Jesus would turn up and have a chat with me..... I could clarify a few things..... and then maybe I would believe”!!!!!!

What vessels of **misplaced self-admiration** we are that we might think we could put this Christ up for questioning..... and put him under our spotlight....

if he turned up, THIS is where we'd all be.... on our bellies, blind and dumb. //

2. The persecutor meets the Persecuted

Instead of **Saul** questioning **Jesus**..... **Jesus questions him** “**Saul Saul**, why do you persecute **ME??**”

Interestingly Jesus doesn't say “Saul, Saul why don't you **like** the **Christians**” or “Saul, Saul why are you full of such **hate** and **rage**”

NO! Jesus asks the supremely **PERSONAL** question of “why do you persecute **ME!**”
///

Jesus said “As much as you do to these little one you do to me”....

Saul missed that teaching... he thought he was out for a couple of scraggly fisherman and headstrong women.

...he didn't count on the enemy being **bigger** than **that!** /

ASIDE: we have this idea that Jesus sits in his palatial heaven looking down on us with his feet on his footstool having finished his work....

this picture is far from the truth, Jesus is busy night and day interacting in the lives of his followers and bringing their prayers and plights to God the Father.

The Bible tells us he is our **advocate** before the **Father**, he speaks the **Father's language**. And he feels for us in our **joys**, our **pains**, our **sufferings** and our **persecutions**.

Jesus takes the persecution of his church extremely **personally**.

When a **Bible study group** in America is **gunned** down..... he takes it **personally**.

When a church in **Nigeria** bombed and **50 Christians die**..... he takes it **personally**.

**Preaching Christ....
...by the power of the Holy Spirit
...and the authority of the Word of God**

When the church is under **fire** from a government who pays him no **heed**....he takes it **personally**.

When **you** are taunted for believing in Jesus..... he takes it very **personally**. //

Jesus, of all people, knows the **sorrow** and the **pain** of **persecution** all too well.

He was **scorned** and **hunted down**, he was **mocked** and his own family thought him **mad**.

He endured the **greatest persecution** at the end of his earthly life when convicted to **death** on a clearly trumped up charge by the likes of **people just like Saul**.

The **innocent** declared **guilty** and killed as though he was the **worst** of all **criminals**.....**bereft** of even his **closest friends**. //

We would understand had Jesus sent a **lightning bolt** to **fry Saul**.

We would understand if Jesus had dropped a heavenly **anvil** and **squashed** him on the **road**.

...but **what** is his **response**.....?

Jesus taught his followers to "**love** your **enemies** and **bless** those who **persecute** you"
//

Like the hated Samaritan in Jesus' story who helps the Jewish man who had been **beaten up** ... Jesus the **persecuted** reaches down to the likes of this **persecutor** and deals with him with **amazing grace**. He introduces himself to **Saul** and without even a hint of **berating**, gives him a **direction**.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. 6 "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

3. The arrestor, arrested

Saul's entourage, heard **sounds** but had no idea what had **happened**...

They took the **blind**, **helpless** and **hapless** Saul to into Damascus.

This one who was meant to enter the city, full of **fury** and looking to **wreak havoc** on the **Christians** there..... ready to **ARREST** any belonging to Jesus..... enters a **broken man**!!

**Preaching Christ....
...by the power of the Holy Spirit
...and the authority of the Word of God**

The **ARRESTOR** Saul had been **ARRESTED** by the **power** of the **resurrected Christ himself** // taken over by the **persecuted Jesus** // **blinded** by his **glory** and well and truly **defeated**..... // yet still alive :)

Meanwhile Ananias is asked by God to go to a place in Damascus and visit a terrorist!
Ananias the forgotten hero!!

13 "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. 14 And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

15 But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. 16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

17 Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, 19 and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Jesus has **de commissioned** Saul from his **last** posting and **commissioned** him for **greater things!!**

The **murdering persecutor** would be Jesus' **chosen instrument of life and salvation**.

He would **build** the church he once wanted to **bind**...

he would **teach** those he had once wanted to **"take-out"**

...and he would proclaim that **grace** - that **amazing grace** -held out to him on the **Damascus Road**.

Jesus had two missions for Saul.... now named Paul.

- 1.He would proclaim Jesus to the Gentiles.... people who weren't Jews
- 2.He would be shown how much he must suffer for Jesus own name.

**Preaching Christ....
...by the power of the Holy Spirit
...and the authority of the Word of God**

We know that Paul covered many miles on his missionary journeys, he wrote many letters to the churches of the first century and he left that legacy for we Gentiles in central and western NSW.

...Read on in Acts and see how his ministry **impacted** the **world** of his **day**.

Read on in Acts and you will see the **suffering** he underwent for the sake of his **master**.

He was **beaten, imprisoned, starved, pursued, hated, was shipwrecked** and we **speculate** finally **beheaded**.

(I wonder if his **greatest** suffering was caused knowing that he was a great sinner and that he hurt Jesus greatly in persecuting His church and that Jesus, only a few years earlier, had hung on a cross to pay for this very violation that Paul may go free. Paul would later write: *"I am the least of the Apostles as I persecuted the church"*)

Saul of Tarsus set out on a **mission** to further his **own cause**.

On the way this man met his **Messiah Jesus**,

this **persecutor** met the one he **persecuted** and

this **arrestor** was **arrested** by the **power** of the **resurrected Christ**. ///

This power didn't crush him or treat him as his sins **deserved**.

This **power** opened his **eyes** to see **clearly** and set him on a new mission.

....a mission that would further the **advance** the **news** of the amazing grace

Paul was totally and absolutely **renovated** and **renewed** and joined the **advancement** of God's **church** on **Earth**.

This advancement **could not** and **would not** be stopped by any human or any **institution** of its **day**. ///

Friends, the **advancement** of God's **church** **marches on!**

The power of the **Resurrected Christ** continues to renovate lives even **today**.

Most of us here have understood it all too well.

Preaching Christ....
...by the power of the Holy Spirit
...and the authority of the Word of God

Look at the lives here in **your** church that have been **renovated!!!!** Share your story with each other and be encouraged!

... look at those who have moved from **opposition** to **Christ** / to furthering the **advance** of his **church**.

Look at how the Lord is still **building** his church **now as he has for over 150 years..**

And in some places now - ... revitalising it... in Bathurst – in Millthorpe – and in other places starting new congregations... such as in **Mudgee** and **Rylstone...**

What should be our attitude to those who would oppose and even persecute us?

We should **pray** for them that their eyes would be **opened** and we should **bless** them with **kindness** and **mercy** as Jesus did for **Paul** and **ourselves**. //

We should be mindful that we aren't **alone** in such times..... that Jesus is more **offended** than we could ever **be!**

And when we are **despondent** as to the anti-Christian direction of our **government**, our **media**, our **learning institutions** --- even our very **friends** and **family**..... when we perceive the **decline** of the **church**.... when mankind and human regimes become **large** in our **thinking**.....

ask yourself if they are a worthy **opponent** to **Jesus** and the **power** of his **resurrection**.

ask yourself if they are able to **command creation**

ask yourself if they have defeated **death!!**

..... then take your eyes **off** them..... look instead to Jesus our **risen Lord**..... and in the power of his resurrection..... join the **mission** to **advance** his **church** and reap the **joy** of seeing **lives**, like **Paul's** / **renovated** in that **very power**.

POSTLOG – note the final verse of the passage – v31

Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.

May this be true of us... may it be so.