

## Sermon Monika 25<sup>th</sup> January 2026

---

### **FIRST Reading:** *Acts 9. 1-22*

Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' He asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' The reply came, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.' The men who were travelling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. 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. Then he got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength. For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God.' All who heard him were amazed and said, 'Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem among those who invoked this name? And has he not come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?' Saul became increasingly more powerful and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Messiah.

### **SECOND Reading:** *Galatians 1.11-16a*

I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

### **Gospel:** *Matthew 19.27-30*

Peter said to Jesus: 'Look, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?' Jesus said to them, 'Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.'

*Loving God, we gather in Your name, and we invite Your Divine presence into this space. Bless our time of worship and learning. In Your holy name, we pray. Amen.*

Today is marked as ‘the **Conversion** of Paul’. The word comes from Latin meaning ‘**to turn, bend**’, described as the process of changing or **causing someone to change from one form to another.**

Angela Tilby writes in one of her *Church Times* contributions: ‘**Conversion is...surrender to reality**’, the process of changing or causing someone to change from one form, from one reality to another.

One moment Paul is hunting any who belonged to the Way, men or women, the next moment he becomes one of them.

Rowan Williams writes: ‘**There is another world, and it is the same as this one.**’ It is like Paul is stepping from one world into another, and it is the same as this one.

Similarly, our gospel reading alludes to **two kinds of worlds or realities**, captured in Jesus’ words: ‘But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first’ – so the ones who are first in one reality are last in the other, and vice versa, a paradoxical reversal.

Paul's journey to Damascus leads him from one world, from one reality to another. Let us trace this journey.

**His first world/reality:** 'Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.'

→ He works as part of a network of religious power

– **power over;**

→ Jerusalem are the headquarters of this powerhouse; Damascus is an outpost;

→ Paul answers to/ works for the High priest;

→ Paul has the power to breathe threats and murder against those who don't conform to this prescribed world and he is authorized to bring them bound to Jerusalem;

→ He has got a reputation of 'how much evil he has done to [the] saints in Jerusalem; and [in Damascus he is known to have] authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke [God's] name.'

This first world or reality can be summarized as follows:

- Paul has got (worldly-religious) power over others,
- he is in charge,
- he has got authority/authorization to persecute others who don't conform to this world(view).

**His second world/reality:** 'Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' He asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' The

reply came, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.' The men who were travelling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so, they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. For three days he was without sight...'

- He falls to the ground;
- He is told by Jesus to get up and enter the city, and that he will be told what he is to do;

→ he can see nothing; so he is led by the hand and brought into Damascus. For three days he is without sight...

The second world or reality can be summarized as follows:

- **he is struck to the ground which makes him powerless;**
- **he is told by Jesus what to do;**
- **he cannot see and has to be led by others by the hand;**

→ **in his powerlessness he absolutely relies on others, on God** – power in this world can be defined as **power with**

So, we have two worlds. Paul knows his role in the first world, and he knows who belongs to his religious group, and who doesn't. He is authorized to persecute those who don't conform to his worldview. **He works as part of a network of power**, with Jerusalem and the high priest at the centre.

The first world is that of worldly-religious power, the second one is God's world, and Paul is being led from one world into the other. He cannot lead himself, but

only God can. **Paul enters God's world or reality by being powerless, struck to the ground, blinded, and having to rely on others. That is how God works, and it is the only way. God cannot work in a world where others have power over others.**

This is also reflected in another famous passage: 'There is strength in our weakness', famously expressed in [2 Corinthians 12:9](#): "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness". There is power - namely God's power - in our powerlessness. It means that true power emerges from vulnerability, acknowledging limitations, and

relying on something greater (like God, or community, or inner resilience).

**It is a paradox where admitting need opens the door for divine help, builds humility, fosters deeper connections, and reveals ultimate strength in surrender, not self-sufficiency. This is the world and the reality of God, which is the only real and lasting reality.**

Both worlds have got a *powerful* network, but they work very differently.

Both networks rely on people to make them powerful.

In the first world authority comes from human beings, the chief priest: ‘and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name’ (power over).

In the second world authority comes from God: ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.’

God has got his own powerful network, and Ananias is part of it: ‘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.’

Extracts from:

*After Jesus Before Christianity: A Historical Exploration of the First Two Centuries of Jesus Movements* by [Erin Vearncombe](#) (Author), [Brandon Scott](#) (Author), [Hal Taussig](#) (Author), [The Westar Institute](#) (Author)

### **Two different kinds of *good news*:**

Good news of the empire – **power over**:

- oppression
- torture
- displacement
- loss of identity etc.

## Good news of Jesus groups – **power with:**

- mostly experienced in communities
- people found *good* in relationships
- thankful for solidarity with others
- help and support in daily life
- values of generosity
- experiments in how to live under an oppressive regime and bonding with one another
- regular meals
- exploring understanding of kindness, joy, Jesus' teachings, mutual support

We are all on our (lifelong) conversion journey from one world or one reality to another, individually and as a community. This other world or reality - heaven is another word for it -, is the same as this one. How does God call us to join heaven, or ultimate reality?

Our readings suggest the following:

→ Paul **fell** to the ground and **heard a voice** ->  
somehow life renders us **powerless**, and in that  
powerlessness, in that surrendering, we can  
learn to discern God's voice for our lives...

→ The Lord **said** to Paul in a **vision** -> we can inwardly/ with our inner eye/with our heart learn to perceive/see God's presence and guidance...

→ The Lord said to him in a vision, 'Ananias'... ->

**God uses and empowers others on our journey... God connects people because remember, this is power with...**

→ And immediately something like scales fell from Paul's eyes -> God somehow enables us to see in a new way; after considerable 'blindness' or not being able to see or make sense of things, God enables us to see God's reality and our place/s in it...

In our other reading from Galatians, Paul expresses again how what he has learned to hear, to perceive, to see, to know of God is through God: 'the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.'

So, I Invite each one of us, and our whole community to become more and more part of God's world and reality, and please remember, '**This other world is the same as this one.**' Jesus is inviting us to join God's network of power. Amen. 1406+