

Conversion of Paul
Sermon text: Acts 9:1-22
Related text: Galatians 1:11-24
Date preached: January 25, 2008

As a life long Lutheran, I have had difficulty relating to experiences individuals have had like that of the Apostle Paul. I have heard stories from people who have had a conversion like experience. I respect those stories. I respect their understanding of what many call their born-again experience. I'll also share that in baptism we experience what it means to be born again, for this is not our work but God's grace.

However, as I reflected on this commemoration in the life of the church, I feel there is one aspect of the story where I and perhaps others in this room may relate.

I'm speaking of the time be it days or years that follow Paul's conversion. As he tells it in Galatians, he is quick to highlight that it was Christ that made this change in him. That is consistent with Paul's understanding and teaching.

In the account recorded in Acts, we have some wording that almost reads as a footnote. After he was baptized, after he regained his sight, Paul spent several days with the disciples, among them being Ananias, and immediately began proclaiming Jesus.

For many of us, when we began our careers, it has been preceded by a period of education, be it a college degree, a trade school, or some specific schooling such as in my case, seminary. In seminary I learned tools for studying scripture. I learned how to plan a Christian Education program. I learned the theology of the church.

However, in seminary there was a lot that we didn't learn. One of my colleagues has noted well over 100 things important in ministry that he never learned in seminary.

This is not to say that seminary education is poor, in fact, I believe that it is excellent. What I've also come to discover and what I believe can be said of almost any other career is that we each get better with experience.

The Apostle Paul grew in his ability to relate the Gospel message to the lives of Gentiles. In looking at his writings, one can see a growth in Paul as he approaches issues in churches in Galatia, Roman, Thessalonica, Corinth and others.

Think of your career. I suspect that we can all look at the first year of our careers and see the growth that has taken place with five, ten, fifteen or more years

of experience. We learn from colleagues. We learn by doing.

Such growth of course is not limited to a career. Such growth is seen in relationships. Mothers and fathers grow in their vocations as parents. Husbands and wives grow together in their relationship with each other. Yes, we can all think of examples where this is not true. Sin infects all relationships and can threaten them. Yet, growth in our roles be it parent or spouse takes place in the more difficult and trying circumstances of life.

Along the way there are doubts and fears to overcome. There are challenges to meet. Communication is key in meeting these challenges, not just with each other, but most importantly with God.

It is God who calls us. God calls us to vocations such as parenthood. God calls us to careers, in a variety of fields. God calls some to political office or social activist roles. God calls us to acts of volunteer service be it in our congregation or community. God calls us into relationships like that what has happened here with you and I.

With each call, regardless of what God calls us to do or be God equips us in our calling. God prunes us in our calls so that what God has called us to do may bear fruit that thrives and achieves God's purpose.

The call may come quickly, but growth in our callings takes time. Such growth is forged in good times and in times of challenge. And in those times of challenge it may seem easier to leave. We can become frustrated. No doubt Paul felt frustrated in his ministry.

Such frustration was expressed in his encounters with the Apostle Peter. Such frustration was expressed in his letter to the Galatians. Yet in those frustrating moments Paul did not abandon his call.

When God calls us, God equips us. When God calls us into relationship, God desires us to grow together, be it in the relationship between pastor and congregation, be it in our careers with those we work with and for or be it as a nation as we begin a new chapter with President Obama.

There will be a time for our calls to end. Some end through term limits. Some end through retirement. All but one ends in death. The calling that doesn't end in death is our calling as God's children. It is

through Christ that we pass through the finality of our calls in this life, into the glory that awaits us in the fullness of God's home.

Until that final calling, may the Holy Spirit dwell within us, that we may grow together in the relationships God has called us, that we may grow stronger in our callings to particular service, and that we may grow wiser in the callings of our careers.
AMEN.