

## **Worshipping God Together**

### **Call to worship**

Minister: Risen Christ, you met Paul on his way to  
Damascus and Peter while he was fishing.

**All: Meet us as we gather here and be with us in  
our daily life,**

Minister: that we may be transformed as they were,  
fulfilling our potential and discovering  
new possibilities in ministry and service.

### **MP 560**

### **Praise my soul**

### **Opening prayer and the Lord's Prayer**

#### **Let us pray:**

Lord, we are here,  
with all our faith and all our doubt,  
in all our strength and in all our weakness,  
We have come from different places,  
carrying different burdens,  
different expectations, different hopes,  
but together we pray:  
God of the road to Damascus,  
shatter our complacency, disturb our certainties  
and open our hearts  
to new possibilities and new truths,  
that the scales of our prejudices, dogmas and mistakes  
may fall away and, like Saul, we may become  
the people you truly made us to be.  
We ask this in Jesus' name,  
Christ who lived and died and rose again AND WHOSE NAME WE PRAY:

**ALL:** Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom  
come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our  
daily bread; And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us  
not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, the  
power, and the glory for ever.  
Amen.

### **Reflecting on God's Word**

Reading: Acts 9:1-19 (NT page 1102-1103)  
Reader: Andrew Coutts

## **Background to the reading**

Luke, the writer of the Acts of the Apostles makes special mention of this encounter of Paul's conversion not only at this instance but later he would refer to this episode twice more, in chapters 22 and 26. Why? Well, God touched Paul's life in such a big way that he opened the Gospel to the Gentiles.

So let us focus on the main point of Luke's recollection of the events.

Saul was a typical Pharisee who knew all the scriptures, the Law and the Prophets and all the traditions but he did not know Jesus the Lord and Saviour. He had a deadly passion namely to wipe out all the followers of Jesus of Galilee or the as Luke says "those who belonged to the Way". He had an excellent future ahead of him as a devoted young Pharisee. When reading the text you can almost witness his devotion. He did everything to the book. He went to the High Priest for letters of referral, authorizing or recommending him to the leaders of the synagogues in Damascus, emphasizing the large contingency of Jews in the city. With the High Priest's approval no one in Damascus, Syria would have argued about Paul's intention to clear out the followers of Jesus.

But God had other plans for his future. On his way to Damascus, a bright light shone from heaven and God spoke to him. He fell to the ground like people usually did in the Old Testament and Jewish literature, when confronted with divine or angelic revelations. In Jewish literature names are often repeated when God calls to someone, drawing special attention to what is about to be said, hence why God said: Saul, Saul! On asking who is speaking to him, the voice says it is Jesus, whom you are persecuting! Then Jesus ordered him to go into the city and wait for Him to send him a message.

No-one else saw anything. His companions just heard a sound. It is amazing that when Paul stood up, he could not see anything and he remained blind for three days, of which he did not drink or eat anything. This can be a reference to Jesus that was risen on the third day.

But God did not only appeared to Saul. He also revealed himself to Ananias, a disciple in Damascus. But unlike Saul, he is hesitant to follow the command of God. He says that he cannot go to Saul since Saul is a committed murderer of the followers of Jesus. It is only when God urges him on a second time and convinces him about his intentions with Saul, that he goes.

When he did go, he found everything as God told him. He found Saul, he laid his hands on Saul like a typical blessing. Immediately Saul could see again. He was then baptized meaning accepted within the fellowship of Christ.

So what was the meaning to the first readers?

Luke wanted to emphasize that although Jesus ascended to heaven, He was still visible and involved in the lives of people through His Holy Spirit. He is indeed the risen Lord who appeared to two people in our reading. Two witnesses were usually needed to convince others about the truth. Luke also wanted to say that although Saul had his own plans, it did not match God's. In due time, Saul's life would change instantly when he met the risen Lord. No one can ever be the same after meeting the risen Lord!

### **By cool Siloam's shady rill**

#### **Sermon**

4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

How often do we hear the voice of the Lord speaking to us?

I bet most/some of you are thinking: is the minister af his heed! I mean how is it possible, if at all?

The good thing is that our reading tells us that it is possible - but only when we have or start a relationship with the resurrected Christ. And when we are free and able to listen to His voice.

I guess it is like the story I read on the internet in the week:

"Before refrigerators, people used icehouses to preserve their food. Icehouses had thick walls, no windows, and a tightly fitted door. In winter, when streams and lakes were frozen, large blocks of ice were cut, hauled to the icehouses, and covered with sawdust. Often the ice would last well into the summer.

One man lost a valuable watch while working in an icehouse. He searched diligently for it, carefully raking through the sawdust, but didn't find it. His fellow workers also looked, but their efforts, too, proved futile. A small boy who heard about the fruitless search slipped into the icehouse during the noon hour and soon emerged with the watch.

Amazed, the men asked him how he found it. "I closed the door," the boy replied, "lay down in the sawdust, and kept very still. Soon I heard the watch ticking."

I think there is a very important lesson for us in this story. We need to be still enough before God to hear His voice, to hear Him speaking words to our souls? And we need to be aware of the different ways God is speaking to us all on a daily basis.

He speaks to us through His Holy word, the Bible. It is funny that when we read our bibles and we are still busy with others things occupying our minds, that we often find ourselves the next morning asking ourselves: What did I read last night? I guess if we cannae remember what we read, how on earth can we expect God to speak to us?

He speak to us through prayer. A well known theologian once said: any prayer must always start with a silence to allow God to touch our souls with His Holy presence, to await Him speaking to us in that moment. And when we speak to the Lord, we need to believe in what we say. I once told you the story of the congregation in South Africa who had a special day of prayer for rain. At the beginning of the service the minister asked everyone if they brought their brollies to church! I mean if they are serious that the Lord will listen to them, why did they not come prepared?

God speaks to us every time we find ourselves in a worship service, whether it is on a Sunday, whether it is at In Focus, or at the Men's Fellowship, or at a house group gathering or at the Break or at a funeral service or a wedding. We just need to listen to the Words of God and apply it to our lives.

He speak to us through His Holy Spirit again on a daily basis through the encouraged and kind words of a friend or relative, through the loving touch of a stranger, through an unexpected telephone call from a long forgotten friend or relative, through an unexpected visit of a friend or relative, through a beautiful sunset or landscape, through nature.

Do you recognise all the ways that God has been speaking to you? If you have missed it, don't worry. God is here, ask him now to make you more aware of His presence in your life and ask him to grant you more silent moments to seek His presence.

Whatever you do, once you recognise the words of God, you will never be the same, just like Saul who became a different person with a different name, who managed to Christianise almost the whole Ancient Roman

Empire! Would that not be wonderful if you and I can get our whole villages to be interested again in God's Holy words?

Amen

**Responding to God's word**

Our offerings are given for the ministry and mission of the church while we sing **MP 649: "The King of love my shepherd is"**.

Prayer of thanksgiving: Robert Gardiner

**MP 857**

**I, the Lord of sea and sky**

**Benediction Receive the blessing of God and go in peace:**

May the Holy Spirit empower you  
to proclaim Jesus as the Son of God,  
and may you meet the risen Christ as you work,  
as you journey,  
in one another, and in the world he came to save.  
And the blessing of God almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you  
and with all whom you love wherever they may be now and for evermore.

**Amen.**

**Sung Amen**