

ST. JOHN THE DIVINE, RASTRICK

Welcome to Morning Worship

18th October 2020

*Click on the underlined links to take you to safe content on the internet.
If you are able light a candle as you start the service and if others are in the house
encourage them to reading some of the service with you.*

Introduction

This is the day that the Lord has made.
Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

We have come together in the name of Christ
to offer our praise and thanksgiving,
to hear and receive God's holy word,
to pray for the needs of the world,
and to seek the forgiveness of our sins,
that by the power of the Holy Spirit
we may give ourselves to the service of God.



Prayer of Penitence

Jesus says, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.' So, let us turn away from our sin and turn to Christ, confessing our sins in penitence and faith.

Together we pray:

**Lord God, we have sinned against you.
we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and repent.
Have mercy on us according to your love.
Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us from our sin.
Renew a right spirit within us
and restore to us the joy of your salvation,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Hymn: [Morning has broken](#)

The Word of God – [Click Here](#)

First Reading: 1 Thesolonians1:1-10 read by Carol Sanderson

Second Reading: Matthew 22:15-22 read by Cherry Fancourt

Reflection prepared by John Mothersdale

In recent weeks and months, our lives have been turned upside down and inside out by a world pandemic. It's affected everyone. To a large extent, for most of us, that is still the case. With that in mind, I decided to talk today about a man whose life was also turned upside down and inside out, not by a pandemic, but by an encounter with Jesus. I'm going to speak about the life of St Paul.

This great missionary character we know as St Paul, originally called Saul, was born in Tarsus, in what is now Southern Turkey. Paul was born a Jew but he was also a Roman citizen of Tarsus, possibly through his father's line. So here was Paul, a Jewish boy, raised in a Greek city in a Roman world – quite a mixture. He was trained as a tent maker and later educated in Jerusalem and became a Pharisee. Pharisees were a strict religious sect, not priests, but they kept strictly to the Jewish law, often extending the way that the laws were intended to operate, losing the spirit of the law and making it hard to keep. They were quite a self-righteous and self-important bunch and Jesus often argued with them. Sometimes they tried to trick him as we saw in today's Gospel reading about paying taxes to Caesar.

Pharisees were very much against the emerging Christian faith, and Paul was no exception. The first we hear of Paul was at the stoning to death of Stephen by a mob outside Jerusalem. Stephen was a strong follower of Jesus and had been brought in front of the Jewish court on trumped-up charges of blasphemy. Paul, still known as Saul at that stage, was there watching, and nodding approvingly as Stephen was killed.

Next, we encounter Paul on his way to Damascus, carrying letters of authority from the High Priest in Jerusalem, seeking, with some enthusiasm, to capture any Christians he found in Damascus to bring them back to Jerusalem for trial. On the way there, Paul had a dramatic experience which turned his life upside down and inside out.

There is no record that Paul ever met Jesus during his earthly ministry, but for sure he met him that day on the road to Damascus. Acts chapter 9 tells us that *a light from heaven flashed around him, and he heard a voice from heaven saying "Saul, Saul why do you persecute me?" And Saul replied "who are you Lord?" "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting" came the reply.* Paul was temporarily blinded and was taken into Damascus where he was looked after by a Christian disciple called Ananias. The man who had intended to enter the city like an avenging fury was led in by the hand, blind and helpless.

Paul's reputation as a vehement opponent of the Christian faith had preceded him and Ananias was understandably apprehensive about being asked to look after him. But the Lord said to Ananias *"Go. This man [Paul] is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel".* Ananias went and found Paul, laid hands on him and 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". Paul's sight was restored, he was baptised as a Christian and he became a changed man. Later, writing to the Corinthians, Paul says *"by the grace of God, I am what I am"*. Paul's changed life became his new "normal". I wonder what our "new normal" will look like – or are we already experiencing it? But people were suspicious of Paul, fearing a trap and not understanding how God could bring about such a complete turn-around in someone.

Paul was not a man for sitting around. His travels and adventures around the Near East and into Europe probably covered around 30 years and you can read about them the Acts of the Apostles – and it's a very good read too. So briefly.....some years after Paul had returned to his home city of Tarsus, Barnabas went there to look for him to help him build up the church in Antioch across the border in Syria, a few days journey away. It was there in Antioch that the disciples were first called "Christians". The two men, Paul and Barnabas, stayed in Antioch for a whole year.

Then around the year AD46, Barnabas and Paul set off from Antioch on the first of Paul's three missionary journeys. This took in Cyprus, travelling through the whole island until they reached Paphos. Maybe some of you have been there on holiday. From there they visited various places in what is now Turkey, preaching about Jesus in the local synagogues and setting up embryonic churches wherever they went. Then they returned to Antioch and reported to the church there of all that God had done through them, and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. They stayed in Antioch for some years.

But Paul, not a man for sitting around, needed to be off again, driven and motivated by the need to spread the Good News of Jesus. On his second missionary journey, starting around the year AD51 Paul, unfortunately having had a disagreement with Barnabas, took Silas as his helper. Paul and Silas revisited places Paul had been to before, to see how the churches there were faring, and then moved on to Greece, notably Philippi, Corinth, Athens, Ephesus, and Thessalonica - we heard from Paul's letter to the Thessalonians today. Again Paul started new Christian communities and had many alarming experiences and adventures, before eventually returning to Caesarea and Antioch.

On his third and final missionary journey, from about the years AD53 – 57, Paul went again to Ephesus, staying there for around three years, again returning to Jerusalem, passing through many places and preaching the ministry and message of Jesus.

But a few days after his arrival back in Jerusalem, Paul was arrested. He was spotted at the temple by some visiting Jews from places where he had earlier visited, and they seized him, shouting, *"men of Israel help us; this is the man who teaches all men everywhere against our people and our law and this place [that is, the temple]"*. This caused major trouble and rioting, the very thing the occupying Roman forces didn't want. Paul was brought before the local Roman governor and then the Jewish court, from which the Romans had to rescue him before he was lynched.

Paul was taken for his own safety to Caesarea, the seat of Roman government in Palestine, and he was held there by the Romans for two years, during which time he had several meetings with the Roman governor there, who had some sympathy for him and for the Christian faith. Paul declared his innocence and appealed to be tried by Caesar in Rome and this request was granted.

And so it was that Paul was taken to Rome. This was to be Paul's last journey, a very long and difficult journey that was not without incident, including being caught in a violent storm and being shipwrecked off Malta, resulting in an unscheduled stay there that lasted for three months. During his time in Rome, Paul was kept under house arrest for two years. He was allowed visitors and seemed to enjoy a reasonable quality of life. We read that *"boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ"*. Paul was probably set free after his trial before Caesar and he may have travelled to Spain. After a second arrest, Paul was executed in Rome by the Emperor Nero, one of the tyrants of history, in about the year AD67.

Paul kept in touch with all the early churches by means of letters, giving them encouragement and guidance, and his abounding legacy to us is contained in these letters, which are sometimes controversial, and comprise large sections of the New Testament. We can think of Paul's letters to the Romans, Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians and Galatians to name but some. Paul's letters would have been the only Christian writing available as the Gospels had not then been written. We read from Paul's letters regularly, Sunday by Sunday here in church.

Paul was instrumental in the spread of the Christian faith in Europe and in the process his life was turned upside down and inside out, and in the end his life was lost. I think we owe him.

Hymn: [One more step along the road we go](#)

The Creed

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again.
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,**

**the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

[Prayers of intercession prepared by Jane Hearson](#)

A Prayer for Church Growth

**God of Mission
Who along brings growth to your church,
Send your Holy Spirit to give
Vision to our planning
Wisdom to our actions
And power to our witness.
Help our church to grow in numbers,
In spiritual commitment to you,
And in service to our local community,
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen**

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray
**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

The Collect for today

O God, forasmuch as without you
we are not able to please you;
mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit
may in all things direct and rule our hearts;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen

Hymn: [We have a Gospel to proclaim. \(Huddersfield choral\)](#)

Final Prayer

Faithful Lord,
whose steadfast love never ceases
and whose mercies never come to an end:
grant us the grace to trust you
and to receive the gifts of your love,
new every morning,
in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Our service ends with the Grace,
**The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the Love of God,
and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all evermore. Amen.**

[Fanfare Impromptu: Balmforth](#)