

## **Pastor Writes**

Greetings to you all.

The theme for our morning meditation is 'the conversion of Paul.' Today has also been year marked as Leprosy Sunday and we are grateful to the Leprosy Mission for coming this morning and sharing with us about the concerns to eradicate Leprosy in our Nation. Our church has been involved in ministering to the children of patients of leprosy over the past 40 years and we continue to support close to 140 children every year through all their education. We give thanks to God for all the members of the congregation who saw this as an important area of Ministry and rose to the occasion and has sustained it over these 4 decades. We continue to seek your support as we head towards our Garden Fete in raising funds for this important outreach project.

Today we also give thanks for the life of St. Paul who was originally known as Saul, a Jew who was born in Tarsus and studied under the great teacher Gamaliel. He was well versed with the Jewish faith. He persecuted the Christians to their death, arresting both men & women and throwing them into prison. The early Christians were known as 'followers of the Way,' and Saul was bent upon destroying them because he thought they were going against the Jewish law and were heretics. In fact he took letters of authorization from the High priest to their associates in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.

As Saul was approaching Damascus suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around them. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying, 'Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?' 'Who are you, Lord?' he asked. 'I am Jesus of Nazareth who you are persecuting,' the voice replied. His companion saw the light but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to him. The Lord asked him to get up and go to Damascus where he was met by Ananias a devote observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. Saul was blinded after they so his companions took him to Ananias.

Ananias then said, 'brother Saul,' receive your sight!' and that very moment he was able to see. Ananias then said! 'The God of our ancestors chosen to know his will to see the righteous One, and to hear words from his mouth. You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard. And now what are you waiting for? Get up be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.

We know that after baptism Paul was no more the old Saul but a new man called Paul. He was transformed from within. He took three different missionary Journeys going to different parts of the world preaching the gospel about Jesus Christ. Here was a man who staunchly opposed the Christian faith but with God's divine touch he was converted into a follower of Jesus. And went on to write almost half of the new Testament.

We live in a situation where the Christian faith is under attack. The ideology and world view of some people seems to be diametrically opposed to the Christian faith and there are people actively wanting to destroy the followers of the Way. In the midst of these situations the Christians pray for those who persecute us because that is exactly what Jesus did. We need to ask Jesus for his compassion with which he reached out to patients with leprosy and other diseases and touched them and healed them. May we pray that those who oppose and persecute us will also come to the saving knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us stand firm in our faith in and continue to pray to him because God alone reigns sovereign.

*Shalom*

*Paul Swarup*