

Sermons at Saint Paul's

A Wellspring of spiritual nourishment; A River of service in Jesus' Name

Conversion of Saint Paul

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We can't say what would have happened to the Christian faith if Paul had not been converted in that famous story about his trip to Damascus. My conjecture is that Christianity would not have survived much beyond the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Certainly the Romans would have stamped out the few churches scattered around their empire.

But regardless of my conjecture, the conversion of Paul is a seminal event in the history of Christianity. Without that conversion, you and I may not have been here this morning. So we owe Paul a great deal in spite of the social limitations of his gospel. Some of his words have been used to bash homosexuals, to subjugate women, to justify slavery and to bolster the sexism of insecure males. If you will excuse me for saying so, I believe Paul would be appalled by the ways some of his words have been used.

On the other hand, some of the most beautiful and profound doctrines arise from the teachings of this same man. He wrote the words that led to the Protestant Reformation: 1,500 years after Paul's death, Martin Luther was touched deeply by Paul's Letter to the Romans and his words, "For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works..." and a whole new world opened up to Luther.

Paul taught us many things. For instance, every Sunday we repeat the words that he taught us about the Holy Eucharist, "On the night before he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread..." They were not his words, they were probably the words of the early church, but we know them because of him.

Paul also taught us about Stewardship. He taught about stewardship of money and urged the churches to send support to the church in Jerusalem. But he also

taught us about more than the stewardship of money; he taught us about the stewardship of our lives.

The stewardship of our lives is for me another way of looking at how we invest not just our money but how we invest our lives. How much of our lives do we save for ourselves and for those we love? How much of our lives do we spend on others? How much of our lives do we waste like pocket change?

Paul talks about a particular kind of investment in this morning's Epistle to the Corinthians: *"Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries."* And there is a stewardship in the very next sentence that is more concrete. He writes, *"But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself."* Boy, do I wish I could say that for myself; although I am getting better at it, I am still a lousy steward sometimes of my life when it comes to self-blame and to guilt.

Paul is also saying that he is a good steward of his forgiveness. Again, he writes, *"I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted."* You and I can be very poor stewards of our forgiveness of others and of ourselves. And yet, forgiveness is essential to being a good steward of our lives.

Our lives are gifts to us that you and I sometimes under-value. We use and misuse our bodies, our time and our emotions. We invest them in ways that do not bring us the returns that God wants for us. In other words, the stewardship of our lives is not seen as a priority in our spirituality. And yet, good stewardship is essential to our spirituality; stewardship of our minds, of our emotions, of our bodies, of our possessions, stewardship of our spiritual gifts, stewardship of our relationships with one another and with our Creator God.

I encourage us all, to pray to God to open our lives to be better stewards of all that we have and of all that we are so that we can say with Paul, *"that we are servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries."*

Amen.