

Acts 9:1-20 Christ has Changed our lives.

This morning, with God's help, we will meditate in the first lesson of today which is Acts 9:1-20. This Lesson tells us how the risen Jesus reached out to touch Saul the Persecutor, and turned him around so completely that he became Paul the Apostle. Let us pray: *Open our ears, O Lord, to hear your word and know your voice. Speak to our hearts and strengthen our wills, that we may serve you today, now and always. Amen.*

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ: Christ is Risen, He is Risen Indeed. Alleluia!

“As children, many of us learn about the wondrous process by which a caterpillar morphs into a butterfly. The story usually begins with a very hungry caterpillar hatching from an egg. The caterpillar, or what is more scientifically termed a larva, stuffs itself with leaves, growing plumper and longer through a series of molts in which it sheds its skin. One day, the caterpillar stops eating, hangs upside down from a twig or leaf and spins itself a silky cocoon or molts into a shiny chrysalis. Within its protective casing, the caterpillar radically transforms its body, eventually emerging as a butterfly or moth.”

Friends, this insect, in its early life can be one of the ugliest creatures on earth. But in one of the great miracles of creation, the ugly caterpillar emerges from a cocoon as a wonderful new creation, as a butterfly whose bright, colourful wings, with which it seems to float on the air makes us view it as a symbol of beauty and as unique part of God's creation.

If we are impressed with the transformation of an ugly caterpillar into a beautiful butterfly, then how much more awe-inspiring is the change that takes place in the hearts and lives of people who have been touched by the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In our text today we have the classic example of that change, as we see how Saul of Tarsus, once the greatest enemy of the church, is transformed into the great apostle Paul, who is viewed by many as the greatest missionary and preacher the church has ever known. But Paul is not the only one who is changed by the resurrection of Christ. Our lives are different too, because Jesus lives. And today, as we remember the change in Paul that came through the living Lord, we want to remember how our lives are changed for the better through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

God's people know the life-giving power of the resurrection. Jesus lives, and He

promises us “**Because I live, you also shall live.**” Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we have a sure and certain hope that death has lost its power over us, and by faith in Jesus Christ we too shall rise to an eternal life of glory with Him. We can look forward to the future in hope, because our faith in a living Lord insures that all things will turn out all right in the end. But we also should not ignore the **life-changing** power that the resurrection brings to our lives each day.

In our text, we see that life-changing power of the resurrected, living Lord at work in Paul’s life. He was not always *Saint* Paul. There was a time when Paul was known as Saul, and was one of the most active persecutors of the church. Saul was present when Stephen, the first Christian martyr, was stoned. And our text tells us that Saul was **breathing out murderous threats against the church**. He had asked for, and received, letters to the synagogues, authorizing him to arrest any men, women, or children who were following the teachings of Christ.

In another place in Scripture, Paul looks back at his life and talks about how zealous he was to destroy the Way, as Christianity was then called. And in our text, Saul was on his way to Damascus, a city about 150 miles from Jerusalem, to expand the persecution against the followers of Christ.

But something happened on the road to Damascus. A light from heaven flashed around him and a voice from heaven spoke to him, “**Saul, why do you persecute me? Who are you, Lord, Saul asked. I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.**” Our text tells us of Saul’s blindness and of his encounter with Ananias—but the most important thing is the result - that through his encounter with the risen Lord, Saul is a changed man, a man who stops persecuting of the Lord’s servants, and who began to preach that Jesus is the Son of God.

Time and time again, the Scriptures give examples of the caterpillar to butterfly change that takes place in the lives of people through the living Lord. And our lives, too, are different because of the living Lord. Speaking from his own personal experience, Paul can say in 1 Corinthians 5:17 “**Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!**”

When John the Baptist was preaching in the wilderness, people were changed by his message of a Saviour so that they said, “**What should we do then?**” *John answered, “The*

man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same." Tax collectors also came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?" "Do not collect any more than you are required to," he told them. Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?" He replied, "Do not extort money and do not accuse people falsely--be content with your pay."

John's message was simple: You are changed in Christ, so put away the deeds of the past and live the new life you have in Christ. Or when the Pharisees bring a woman caught in adultery to Jesus, he dismisses her with a word of forgiveness and the firm admonition: ***"Go now and leave your life of sin."*** And that is the change that we are called to through the resurrection of Christ. But is that new life in Christ always seen in us? Have you always been holy, perfect?

I know I am not. I have not always loved God with my whole *"heart, soul, strength and mind."* Yet, that is what He asks of me. There have been times, admittedly, when I have put other things before God – *my* priorities, *my* pleasures, *my* needs. I have thought more of myself than I have thought of Him.

How about you? Have you *"loved your neighbor, as yourself?"* Have you overlooked someone in need? Have you failed to honor your parents as you should? Have you used your tongue to whisper gossip or to tell a lie? Have you used your eyes to look lustfully? Have you used your hands to hinder someone rather than help them? Have you used your feet to run away from responsibility, or worse, to run away from God?

Honestly we have not measured up to God's standards. God tells us what we ought to do and what we ought to avoid, but simple honesty says we have not done what He has asked of us. In fact, we have done just the opposite of what God has asked.

So, where is the change that should be in the lives of God's people? Sadly, the old life, the sinful life still clings to us. But our sinful past can be overcome; we can be changed just as dramatically as Paul was through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Paul puts it this way in Romans 6:1-14: ***What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus***

were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin-- because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.

Friends, in our baptism, God gives us the new life that is ours in Christ. He gives us all the blessings and power of Jesus' death and resurrection. And just as the Risen Christ changed Paul, so He changes us. Now, in that new life we have in Christ, we serve the Lord in joyful obedience, free from the vices and evils and temptations of the past. Our lives are different because they are filled with hope and peace and victory. And we can be all that God calls us to be because our lives are changed through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Friends, God does not just wipe off the dirt and put some new clothes on the person. No, He completely changes him from the inside out_making him into a brand new person. And the agent for this change is Jesus Christ. It is only through Jesus that this dramatic transformation takes place. The heart of faith which knows and believes that Jesus is the Saviour is a changed heart.

Because of Christ our lives are changed. For Paul, the change was from persecutor to promoter, from enemy to ambassador. That is part of the change that the living Lord brings to us, too. But He also changes us from sinner to saint; from outcast to obedient child. On the Damascus road, the risen Christ changed the life of Saul forever. We are changed too, because Christ lives - and because He lives we have new life in Him.

So my dear friends in Christ; keep believing. Keep walking the walk of faith. Keep talking the talk in your Christian witness. Keep telling people about Jesus. Keep helping those in need, keep confessing your sins and singing hymns of praise and thanks to our Lord and Savior. Amen