

## CONVERSION OF PAUL

JANUARY 25, 2022

Acts 26:9-21

Psalm 67

Galatians 1:11-24

Matthew 10:16-22

Robert Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken" brings to the fore the choices of direction that we each encounter. The poem puts forth the possibility that a person could take both roads rather than make a choice between the two – take one and then come back and take the other one on another day and see if they come to the same ending. That would probably not happen. Which one seemed the most appealing, the one where more feet had trod or the one that indicated the unknown? Was there really a difference between them? In the poem, the choice was the less travelled and according to the poet, it made all the difference. But the difference is not explained. It is for us to interpret.

We are often encouraged to take one path or another. Family pressure, peer pressure, educational choices play a role. It may be ancestral history and tradition that provides the expectations. Children of lawyers become lawyers – children of doctors become doctors. Despite the expectations, there are those who find their fulfillment in other fields apart from their families – they take the road not taken by those who have gone before.

Saul came from a deeply religious Jewish background. A family who was educated in the ways of Judaism – respected in the temple and looked up to. He had been trained as a Pharisee and he was the son of a Pharisee.

His background led him to join other Jews in the persecution of the Gentiles. Earlier in the book of Acts, we learn of the stoning of Stephen. Saul did not directly participate in the killing but those who did so laid their coats at Saul's feet and he approved of their actions. Following Stephen's death, Saul continued his persecution by removing Gentiles from their houses and sending them to prison.

Considering his ancestry and background, it is no surprise that he chose the more travelled road of his heritage.

There is the old adage, that we make plans and God laughs. Persecution was not a matter to be taken lightly and God had other plans for Saul. In today's passage we hear of his encounter on the road to Damascus. A shining light, a voice from heaven and the loss of his sight. This was the turning point. The change from the road directed by persecution to the new road of following Christ. God not only led Paul away from his old ways but he gave him a new purpose and direction. Not a person to do things by halves, Paul took his new role seriously and established and supported churches throughout the region. He was tireless in his ministry.

How do we relate to Paul's conversion? By choosing a path for our lives do we become so earnest that we lose sight of other possibilities? Do we become so blindly stubborn in our choice that we fail to consider another way? Do we re-assess our decisions to see if they are still the correct ones in light of changing circumstances?

Neither the road more travelled or less travelled may prove to be the ultimate path. I have changed course many times in my life. Was it by my choice or pure chance or divine guidance? I cannot say for certain. Did I always change willingly? A definite no! Were their questions about why this was happening – a definite yes! At what point do we let go, and let God guide us. A booklet from St Mary's Southern Province states that the best vocation for anyone is the one God intends for that person. We each have a unique calling which comes with benefits and challenges.

God is there to show the way. Be open to it.