

they gladly died, and I asked myself, 'Would I, could I, die for Him tonight to get the gospel to the ends of the earth?'"

I wonder would we?

H. G wells said at the age of 61 "I have no peace, all my life is at the end of tether. Kenneth Williams's last journal entry simply said, "What's the point"

A famous cartoonist left a note on his pillow the night he took his own life it read: "I have had few difficulties, many friends and great success. I have gone from wife-to-wife, house-to-house, visited many countries but I am fed up of inventing devices to fill 24 hours a day. Life without Jesus will be empty even when to others it appears full. In his second letter to timothy Saul who became Paul wrote, "I am already being poured out as a drink offering and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have run the race, I have kept the faith. Finally there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness.

The apostle Paul's life was far from easy; his call was demanding and total. He knew what it was like to be hungry, to feel disappointment and failure, but he kept going because he had tasted Jesus and there was nowhere else to go...

Years ago an actor was asked to do a recital for the pleasure of his fellow guests.

He agreed and asked if there was anything special that his audience would like to hear.

After a moments pause an elderly man asked that he recite the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. A strange look passed over the actor face, but he agreed on one condition, that the elderly man do the same.

The actors voice was flawless, and he held his audience captivated by his rendition. The elderly man then rose and began to speak..."The Lord is my shepherd..." His voice wasn't remarkable, and his intonation not faultless. Following the Psalm the actor then rose to his feet and laid his hand upon the elderly mans shoulders.... I my friends reached your eyes and your ears, but this man has touched your hearts, for while I know the Psalm, this man knows the shepherd of whom it is written. We can talk about Jesus, we can read about Jesus, we can eve know about Jesus, but until like Paul we taste him, we will never experience him and be willing to give our all for him.... Countless millions have encountered our Lord on the road to Damascus and in so doing have found their purpose in life.

As we receive the sacrament today may we taste our Lord afresh, coming open and willing to journey with him and take others with us no matter the cost? **Amen.**

## St Mary's Sanderstead Easter 3 Acts 9 'Saved for a Purpose' Fr. Grant Cohen

A lecturer was invited to speak at the university of Chicago's school of divinity. After taking the platform the lecturer then spent over two hours attempting to prove that the resurrection of Jesus was a lie. He used vast resources from different scholars to prove his point after which he invited questions. For a moment the floor was silent, then an elderly man near the back stood and began to eat an apple. I have a simple question for you sir, I haven't read any of the books from which you quote, I can't read the bible in Greek or Hebrew and I don't know any thing about the theologians you have talked about, and with that he held up what remained of his apple.

What I would like to know is whether my apple is bitter or sweet? Everyone looked at the elderly man puzzled at his bizarre and ridiculous question to such an eminent scholar. I cannot possibly tell you the answer since I have not tasted your apple. The elderly man then dropped his apple core onto the floor and said, neither sir have you tasted Jesus.

Today's first reading is the story of when Saul tasted Jesus for the first time. We're told that he was born in the beautiful city of Tarsus, the place where Anthony met Cleopatra, and while being Jewish he was also a roman citizen, a man of great intelligence and a zeal for the truth he held to...and so when he hears Stephen proclaiming that the old way of having a relationship with God was over and that it was now through Jesus salvation was obtained, this zealous Pharisee feels as if the carpet has been pulled from underneath him and he has to do something about it.

Jim was a Methodist who had a zeal for almost everything he did, including sharing his faith. While working as a barber he one day lathered up a customer for a shave. Poised to begin the shave he took his cutthroat razor and asked the customer "Are you ready to meet your God?" The man fled the shop with the lather still on his face.

Zeal is a powerful factor in getting things done, but if misplaced can be extremely dangerous as we know all too well from *isis*. Its difficult for us to imagine what it was like for Christians living in Damascus who will have known of Saul's involvement in Stephens horrific death, and that he was now going from house to house looking for others who proclaimed the name of Jesus.

C.S. Lewis who was once an avid atheist wrote: "I didn't go to religion to make me happy. I always knew a bottle of Port would do that. If you want a religion to make you feel really comfortable, I certainly don't recommend Christianity..."

As Saul travels to make arrests and dispose of the church something remarkable happens... "Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me...." Now it's his turn to experience fear. "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting...." We don't know where Saul was while Jesus was preaching, it may well be that he knew of him, after all he would almost certainly have been in Jerusalem for the Passover and may well have even heard Jesus preach in the temple. "It's hard for you" says Jesus, "to kick against the goad." In biblical times farmers would take a long piece of oak that had a spike on the end, and if the ox was ever tempted to turn in any way except the way the master wanted, the spike or 'goad' would do its job reminding the ox who was in charge... "This is how it will be for you Saul from now on as you take up my plough..."

I read of a cartoon strip in which there were four panels, the first was of a New Testament Christian: "Lord, give me the courage to face this mob with stones

Then a Reformation Christian: "Lord, help me declare your truth despite the cost."

The 3<sup>rd</sup> was of A 20th Century believer from Soviet Russia: "Lord may we persevere faithfully under these burdens." Then finally, today's Christian: "Lord, the Audi's been running rough lately."

I wonder how our Christian life is characterised?

The pony express has been gone for over a hundred years. It was a private company in the states that carried the post by an organised relay of horses and the cost of sending a letter by it was £1.75 an ounce.

If the weather, along with the horses held out and the Indians held off the letter would complete its 2000-mile journey in about 10 days. Being a rider wasn't an easy job and they were expected to ride about 100 miles a day changing their horse every 25 miles or so. An advert for the job was placed in the newspaper it read.... Young skinny wiry fellows wanted - not over 18. Must be expert riders and willing to risk life daily. Orphans preferred.

I wonder what how advert in the *Church Times* might read for people to become disciples of Jesus today?

The early followers of Jesus knew exactly what they were signing up for...as many in countries around the world today do where Christianity is illegal and carries a death sentence.

Just 2 days ago the BBC reported that that the persecution of Christians was nearing genocide. That around the world Christians are the most persecuted religious group, with acts of violence and intimidation becoming widespread, that in parts of the Middle East, Christianity could be "wiped out" as people flee persecution. In fact Over 4000 Christians were killed for their faith last year in Nigeria alone.... And for the third year in a row incidents of Christian persecution have risen.

I wonder if when we decided to follow Jesus if we saw it as a one-way journey...as something that we were compelled to do, and to which there was no turning back...Certainly the disciples felt so...as we read when people deserted Jesus and he asked the disciples if they too wanted to walk away Lord where else can we go...only you have the words of eternal life...." But is that it? Is becoming a Christian just about a personal acquisition of everlasting life?

No...the primary task of all followers of Jesus is to lead others to him; it is not just the job of the paid Christian worker. Our faith is not a private affair, it is to be shared and broadcast by words and action.

Archaeologists digging in the remains of a school for imperial pages in Rome found a picture dating from the third century. It shows a boy standing, his hand raised, worshipping a figure on a cross, a figure that looks like a man with the head of an ass. Scrawled in the writing of a young person are the words, "Alexamenos worships his God." Nearby was a second inscription: "Alexamenos is faithful." Here was a young lad being laughed at by his schoolmates for being a Christian, but he was not ashamed...he had tasted Jesus.

I wonder what does our life mean to us.... and where does our faith figure in it...?

From the very beginning of his pilgrimage, Saul is told that he will suffer for the name of Jesus and this is something that we like to forget, but this was a standard aspect of discipleship for the early church, as the basic call of Christ is of discipleship to a cross and a normal part of what it means to be a Christian.

In ancient Rome, crowds by the tens of thousands would gather in the Coliseum to watch as Christians were torn apart by wild animals. Commenting on their visit to this famous landmark, one writer said, "I stood uncovered to the heavens above, where He sits for whom