

St Paul

29 June 2014

Acts 9: 1-22; Galatians 1: 11-24; Luke 24: 44-48

St Paul's Day, a special day for a multiplicity of reasons, a day of beginnings and endings. Two years ago today, Randall started as the new rector in this parish, today I finish as the assistant priest in the parish. Beginnings, endings, they have so many layers and levels. In some respects every day is both a beginning and an ending. It is an ending to yesterday, an ending to all that was occurring previously, an ending to what we knew, it is also the beginning of a new day, a beginning of new activities and projects, a beginning of new things both known and unknown. All these beginnings and endings bring with them joy and sadness. Joy at the expectation of something new, something different, something to be unveiled, and the excitement of unknown new beginnings. Sadness at the end of what we knew, the end of what we had, the discomfort and disquiet at the unknown future new beginnings.

For the past two and a half years I have journeyed with you, I have developed and grown from a 'brand new, very unaware, ordained person', to a confident, hopefully capable priest who is deemed to be capable of being in charge of a parish on her own. The support and help and assistance I have gained from all of you has been tremendous. I thank you all for your support, prayers and helpful advice along the way. The parish has changed in the two and a half years I have been here. The way we do baptism ministry has changed, we now have a very capable band of 10ish people who willingly and enthusiastically assist once a month in the preparation of those bringing children for baptism and they also assist in the service itself. Without this team, the baptism ministry here at St Paul's could not exist as it does. There is also a new team of very enthusiastic and innovative people who offer children's ministry during the service. This team has become confident and self-organising, and prepare sessions appropriate to the diverse ages of the children who attend while delivering a liturgically based lesson in which the children learn about their Christian faith. This ministry is vital if we are to continue to have an active and vibrant congregation because, it is only through our talking about our faith and who God is for us, that others will come to any recognition of who God is for them and their faith, in turn, grows through that knowledge and understanding. It doesn't have to use 'formal language' it doesn't have to be complex theology, just sharing how the scriptures 'talk to you'.

That is what Paul did. He was going full steam ahead, a 'good Jew', by his own account a 'very good Jew', one 'advanced in Judaism beyond many among [his] people of the same age', he was adamant that those of 'the Way' (as the early Christians were known) were not following Judaism properly and he was going to make sure they were stopped, permanently. Then, on the way (pun intended) to his next group of 'dissidents', he was brought to a very sudden and very dramatic 'life changing' moment. And after this 'change of life', Paul just went out talking, telling everyone who would stop long enough to hear, who Jesus Christ was and how God had brought about this 'life changing' moment in his very Jewish life. Paul was still a very good Jew, he still held and practiced the full Jewish religion, it is just that now he allowed the Spirit to work through him as he joined the other disciples in spreading the message of Jesus.

Paul was invited to join a new life journey, he had his life all mapped out, he knew what had to be done, and he was going to do it. But through his life changing moment, he was invited to change

direction, to take a different path. This parish is being invited to change directions too. We are now a parish with more than one weekly Sunday service; we are a parish with 200 odd new members who aren't always quite sure how they fit into the existing structure of this parish life. We are challenged to create new ways, new pathways where we can journey together as we all walk toward the same goal. We will soon have a new music ministry which may well take you in different directions from the ones you are used to walking. We have a new youth ministry which, while still in its infancy, is champing at the bit to find how they will fit into and provide ministry within this parish structure. In a couple of years, even the inside of this church will change, the organ will be rebuilt and its position in the church will change. And that change may end up being more than just a physical repositioning, but that is yet to be discovered, that enlightenment is yet to dawn. Most of you sitting there in the pews are probably sitting in the same pew you sat in last week, and last month, and last year, and , but some of you may soon discover you will be need to find a new 'usual' or 'my' place because the repositioning of the organ will necessitate the removal and/or relocation of some of the pews. But some important questions are raised by this, does sitting in the same place every week mean you are not open to change, not open to an invitation, like Paul, to take a new road, change directions and embrace new opportunities? I hope not.

If our faith is to grow, new opportunities and new directions are an essential ingredient. Change can be painful, change can be scary, new directions can be unsettling, but unless we take them, our lives will not grow, we will not grow, we will become stagnant and lifeless. This parish has a long history, a well known history, an important history, but it also needs to have a well known and important present. An important and well known presence, both in the community in which it belongs, and in the life of all those who are part of it. Unless St Paul's is able to develop and embrace change, it will not survive. Change is inevitable and many changes are in the expected future of this parish. Changes in how ministry is offered in the parish. There will only be one paid priest in the parish for at least the next 5 months, the ministry offered by Shelley is important, but she is only able to be available 1 weekday and Sunday, our two non-stipendiary clergy are, sadly, not able to be as active within the parish as they once were and their ability to assist in the weekly services is limited. So how does the parish continue to keep doing what it has always done with these greatly reduced resources? It can't. But that doesn't mean we all throw up our hands and give up. No, it means you, the parish, ask yourselves, what can I do, how can I assist. The baptism and children's ministry's, parish visiting and pastoral care, Music box, the gardening group, catering group, maintenance group, support centre, St Paul's has many existing ministry areas all of which are vital in the ongoing outreach to those who we meet both intentionally and unintentionally. You are the face of the church in the community. Now I can feel your 'unspoken' responses, 'I am already stretched', 'I already do this', I know that many of you are very involved in many of these and other ministries already, and some of you, because of health, age or other reasons can no longer commit to these, but you can pray for those who do. Prayer is an important ministry as well. Without prayer, many of our ministries would not get off the ground. If you are unable to offer physical assistance, pray for those who are. But another side of this change is also the fact that things within the structure and functioning, the regular pattern of activities in the parish as it has been up to now may need to change. Randall is just one man. A very capable man, a very enthusiastic man, but he is still just one man. And prayer will not change that. So how things happen around the parish may have to change in the future.

This parish has a long future before it, a blessed future which relies on the blessed people who are part of it. The 'Abraham Lincoln' may have flown a banner declaring 'Mission Accomplished', but history tells us the mission was not accomplished, there was still a mission to be accomplished. The sending of Jesus into the world to bring salvation to humankind may have been seen as 'Mission Accomplished', but the mission still goes on, Jesus left the disciples with a mission which we today still carry, there is still a mission to be accomplished, a mission to continue to show the love of Christ and the message of Christ in the world. May you, the people of St Paul's continue into the future, strong and resilient, taking in your stride the changes necessary to continue to offer ministry in this community of Ipswich and beyond.

Thank you for allowing me to be part of your mission, I will not be far away, Boonah is 'just down the road', and I would welcome any visitors who find themselves 'in the area' and I will continue to pray for you as you pray for me. Thank you and may God bless you.

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St Paul's Anglican Church
Ipswich