

Acts 9:26-31 ¹

1. Mike Bradley Proclaims the First Reading, NAB. All write down words, phrases, images which “resonate.”

2. Echo Back a Response

Participants share words and images which struck the heart and mind and imagination as they listen.

There is **no discussion, no questions** except for clarification.

3. Echo The Tradition (Fr. Pat’s Presentation)

Acts of the Apostles. Better title: The Acts of Peter and Paul

Peter is the main character in the first part of Acts.

Paul is the main character in the second part of Acts.

Background Information, 1: Saul / Paul

Unlike Simon, whose name was changed to Peter / Cephas, the name of Saul / Paul was never changed.

All his life long he went by “Saul” among Jews, and “Paul” among Gentiles.

Notice that in our reading Luke calls him “Saul,” even though he is now a believer in Jesus!

Many Jews, even today, have two names:

One they use with Jewish friends & family; One they use with Gentiles

E. g. **Berakah** (*Blessing*) might go by **Betty**. **Moshe** (Moses) might go by **Marvin**.

When I studied Hebrew at a local synagogue, the Rabbi gave me the name *Abba Pinchas* (Father Phineas).²

Background Information, 2: Conversion / Call

January 25 is the Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul the Apostle

Paul never, even once refers to his experience as a “conversion.”

He never imagines that he has “changed his religion,” or “converted” to a new religion.

Rather, he refers to it as a “call.” See Galatians 1:15. Also Rom 1:1; 1 Cor 1:1.³

Using this language puts Saul / Paul in the tradition of the **prophets**.

The LORD called me from the womb (Isa 49:1). See also Jer 1:4-5.

To use a more contemporary example, Paul received a **vocation** (call!) from God.

Just as becoming a seminarian, or entering the novitiate, is not a change of religion, so it was with Saul!

Our reading today begins shortly after Saul’s “call” -- not his conversion!

Many believers have not yet heard about it, and are afraid of him.

Paul’s Own Story: A Look at Galatians 1:15-2:1

But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, ¹⁶ was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with flesh and blood, ¹⁷ nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia; and again I returned to Damascus.

¹ My main resources are: Reginal H. Fuller, *Preaching the Lectionary: The Word of God for the Church Today* (Liturgical Press, 1984); Dianne Bergant, with Richard Fragomeni, *Preaching the New Lectionary: Year B* (Liturgical Press, 1999).

² There were two men named Phineas in the Bible. The son of Aaron (over) zealous for the law of Moses (Numbers 25). The son of Samuel was a great sinner (1 Samuel 1). I never asked the Rabbi which one I was named after!

³ Many translations mistakenly render these last two instances as “called to be an apostle.” In the introduction to his letters, Paul is claiming that God has **called him an apostle** -- and that is the “gold standard.” If God calls Paul an apostle, it does not matter what anyone else thinks! Paul is not thinking like the Apostles of *Superstar*: “Always knew that I’d be an apostle; **knew that I would make it if I tried**. For Paul there is no inkling that he has to “try” to “be” an apostle. It is God’s gift to him! God’s burden for him!

¹⁸ Then **after three years** I went up to **Jerusalem** to visit **Cephas**, and remained with him **fifteen days**. ¹⁹ But I **saw none of the other apostles** except **James the Lord's brother**. . . . ²¹ Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. ²² And I was **still not known by sight to the churches of Christ in Judea**; ²³ they only heard it said, "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." . . . 2:1 Then **after fourteen years** I went up again to Jerusalem with **Barnabas**, . . . (RSV)

Historical Observations -- Observations about the science of “doing history.”

Paul is what historians call a **primary source**. He is writing about what he himself has experienced.

He is writing about his own experience.

He writes 18-19 years after his call (ca. A.D. 36), 15-16 years after his visit to Jerusalem (ca. A.D. 39)⁴

Luke is what historians describe as a **secondary source**. He is writing about what he has learned from others.

He was not personally present at the events about which he writes.

He is writing ca. A.D. 85, approximately 45-50 years after the events.⁵

A modern example:

The press releases about Vatican II from Rome by Xavier Rynne in the years 1962 - 1965

A Church historian who writes *A History of Vatican II* in the year 2015.

Different Perspectives

Both Luke and Paul have perspectives. Both have agendas! They are as different as Baptists and Catholics!

Luke	Paul
Paul leaves because of Jewish plot (9:23) Saul Leaves Damascus (9:25), Arrives in Jerusalem (9:26) Saul is dependent on the Other Apostles Saul is anxious to join up with the apostles They are afraid of him, until Barnabas introduces him -- presumably to them all!	Paul has trouble with King Aretas (2 Cor 11:32) Three years separate these events Paul is independent of the Apostles His revelation is from God -- not from “flesh & blood”
Saul goes “in and out” with the Apostles (9:28) Saul preaches boldly in Jerusalem (9:29)	Barnabas comes with Paul only after 14 years Paul stayed with Cephas a couple of weeks He also had a brief encounter with James He met none of the other apostles Paul is “unknown to the Churches in Judea”

Luke is not writing “simple history” (**NOT** Sgt. Joe Friday: “Just the facts, ma’am; just the facts.”)

Observations from Luke Timothy Johnson

We can observe briefly, then, the ways in which Luke’s divergences from Paul can be seen as part of his consistent literary and religious preoccupations. It should cause us no surprise that Paul emphasizes his independence from Jerusalem in his account, for the authenticity of his experience and apostolate was under active threat. Neither does it surprise us that Luke emphasizes Paul’s connection with Jerusalem, not because he has a desire to relativize Paul’s significance, but because *all* of the missionaries in Acts are brought into connection with the Jerusalem leadership as quickly as possible.⁶

Contemporary Observation

Why is it important to be aware that Luke is not writing “simple history.”

⁴ See Raymond E. Brown, “The Life of Paul,” and “The Letter to the Galatians,” both in *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Doubleday, 1997) 428, 468.

⁵ Ibid., “The Gospel According to Luke,” 426.

⁶ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina Series, vol. 5 (Liturgical Press, 1992), 174.

Often Acts is used in ecclesiology -- the study of the Church.

In the past, Luke's views have been naively accepted as an example of "how the church as always been structured."

This includes the roles of apostles, bishops, elders, women.

A more nuanced view sees that Luke's view, while inspired, is one of many NT views "in tension" with each other.

This awareness gives the Church more freedom "going forward."

Luke's structures might not be the best ones for every age; or for every region of the world.

4. Questions, Comments, Observations: Echo the Tradition Again

5. X Proclaims the First Reading from a Second Translation

6. Participants Name the Good News: for the original listeners; for the present-day hearer.

7. Name the Challenge. Participants share the challenges of the text for the first hearers.

How does the text challenge the experience and understanding of the *present day* listener?

What is the *pain* and *bondage* and *brokenness* in the human situation touched by this text?

Psalm 22:26-28, 30-32

Response: I will praise you, Lord, in the assembly of your people.

1. X Proclaims the Psalm, NAB. All write down words, phrases, images which "resonate."

2. Echo Back a Response

Participants share words and images which struck the heart and mind and imagination as they listened.

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3. Echo The Tradition (Fr. Pat's Presentation)

Structure of the Psalm.

Some commentators divide the psalm into 2 sections; others 3 sections; the NABRE gives 4 headings.

Read the whole psalm until you are familiar with it; then make your own outline!

There is general agreement that the first part of the psalm is a lament; the final part is a hymn of praise.

The first part of the psalm -- My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? -- is better known than the rest of it.

This is because these words are found on the lips of Jesus in the Passion Narratives of Mark and Matthew.

Our selection today comes from the end of the psalm.

The Hebrew is very difficult. Here is one example that illustrates its obscurity.

Different translations number the verses differently.

NET (22:29-30)	NABRE (22:30-31)
All of the thriving people of the earth will join the celebration and worship; all those who are descending into the grave will bow before him, including those who cannot preserve their lives. A whole generation will serve him.	All who sleep in the earth will bow low before God; All who have gone down into the dust will kneel in homage. And I will live for the LORD; my descendants will serve you.

One Poem -- Several Meanings

Throughout most of the OT, there was no hope of life after death. This was a recent doctrine at the time of Jesus.

After experiencing the resurrected Jesus, Christians began to give new meaning to obscure passages.

The NET does a good job of reproducing the “original meaning” of the OT psalmist.
The picture is of community worship in the Jerusalem Temple
Everyone -- from the **healthy** to the **very sick & dying** are praying in the Temple
Even those who cannot save their lives.

The NAB does a good job of interpreting how early Christians might have understood the psalm.
The celebration is not of those living now. It is of those **who sleep in the earth.**
The psalmist is not thinking of those who “cannot preserve their lives.” He proclaims “**I will live for the LORD.**”
Those who serve God are the descendants of the psalmist -- they follow his teaching!
In Wisdom literature, the speaker often refers to his pupils as “children.”

Liturgical Usage

In Easter Time the Church imagines this psalm as a prayer of Christ.
The risen Christ continues the prayer he began on the cross -- My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?
The **Church** on earth, his risen body, prays the psalm. Christ praises his Father in the midst of this **Assembly!**
The Greek word *ekklesia* can be translated either “Church” or “Assembly”
In Greek there is no difference between “The Church of God” and “The Assembly of God.”
The risen Christ, now, in heaven, praises his Father in the “assembly of your people” -- i.e., the saints in heaven.

4. Questions, Comments, Observations: Echo the Tradition Again

5. Pat Davis Proclaims the Psalm from a Second Translation

6. Participants Name the Good News: for the original listeners; for the present-day hearer.

7. **Name the Challenge.** Participants share the challenges of the text for the first hearers.
How does the text challenge the experience and understanding of the *present day* listener?
What is the *pain* and *bondage* and *brokenness* in the human situation touched by this text?

1 John 3:18-24

1. **Pat Davis Proclaims the Second Reading, NAB.** All write down words, phrases, images which “resonate.”

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Fuller’s Remarks

C. H. Dodd suggested that here the author has thrown together some notes he did not have time to develop.

1. Only if we love one another are we assured of our standing as Christians.
2. If we are uncertain about our standing -- trust that God knows us better than we know ourselves!
3. If our conscience is clear, we are free to live a life of prayer and obedience to God’s commandments.
4. God’s expectations are summed up: A) faith in Christ; B) Love for one another
5. The external test of union with God is whether or not we keep the commandments.
6. The internal test is the gift of the Spirit

Children

The address shows affection. It is also characteristic of the **Wisdom tradition.**

The “Wisdom” books of the Bible include: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Wisdom, Sirach. This tradition was **international** in the OT. It did not depend on God’s special revelation to Israel.

Rather, it was based on human observation of **how to live successfully**.

This included learning how to “get along with your boss -- such as a king or prince.

How to win friends and influence people.

How to be successful as a farmer -- learn God’s will as manifested in nature.

This influence of this tradition also appears in certain sections in other books -- our reading today is an example.

Another example would be the genre of “parables” including the parables of Jesus.

The Johannine emphasis on “keeping the commandments” is more than simply morality “for its own sake.”

Rather, it is “living in harmony with God’s will.”

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5. X Proclaims the Second Reading from a Second Translation

6. Participants Name the Good News: for the original listeners; for the present-day hearer.

7. **Name the Challenge.** Participants share. Participants share the challenges of the text for the first hearers.

How does the text challenge the experience and understanding of the *present day* listener?

What is the *pain* and *bondage* and *brokenness* in the human situation touched by this text?

John 15:1-8

1. **Jim Owen Proclaims the Gospel, NAB.** All write down words, phrases, images which “resonate.”

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Agricultural Imagery in the Synoptics -- Plants

We have the parable of the Sower and the Seed.

The parable of a small Mustard Seed becoming a Large Plant

We also have the parable of the Weeds and the Wheat growing together, eventually separated at the harvest.

We have the parable of the workers in the vineyard.

All of these are images of **the kingdom of God**

Johannine Imagery

Last week we saw how the imagery of animal husbandry was transformed in the Johannine tradition.

Rather than a parable of a **Lost Sheep** found by a shepherd we got **I am the Good Shepherd**.

The Johannine imagery is on the **mystery of the person of Jesus**.

As with the images from animal husbandry, the Johannine images involving plants focus on the person of Jesus.

So we get another “I-am” statement: **I am the vine; you are the branches**.

The focus is on the relationship between the individual believer and Jesus.

Last week Brother Mike pointed out how very different this image is from Paul’s image of the Body of Christ.

Bearing Fruit

Recall our discussion last week of the history of the Johannine Community.

“Bearing fruit” means having faith in the person of Jesus

In the Epistles it will be made more explicit: faith that he came **in the flesh** -- as a **fully human** person.

“Bearing fruit” also means keeping God’s commandments.

Catholics and Baptists

I think we Catholics do a better job understanding the communal imagery of the NT, e.g., body-of-Christ imagery.

I think Baptists do a better job emphasizing the importance of a personal relationship with Jesus.

We are good for each other!

When I was young, I thought the world would be a better place if everyone were Catholic. I got over it!

Now I thank God for all of my Baptist friends -- and all of my other Protestant friends.

Become my disciples

These are the last words of our passage. They come from John 15, part of the Last Supper.

Are they not **already** his disciples?

I think this line shows that “becoming a disciple” is not a one-time experience.

It is a lifetime of “becoming.”

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7. Name the Challenge. Participants share the challenges of the text for the *first* hearers.

How does the text challenge the experience and understanding of the *present day* listener?

What is the *pain* and *bondage* and *brokenness* in the human situation touched by this text?