



St Marylebone  
Parish Church

## BCP Holy Communion 8.30am, 11<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity

*Epistle 1 Corinthians 15.1-11*

*Gospel Luke 18.9-14*

S. Paul says it all in today's Epistle.

Christ rose from the dead, He met Cleopas on the road to Emmaus, He appeared to the disciples in the upper room. Those appearances turned frightened men who had given up on the Gospel and gone home, into men who crossed the known world to bring people Jesus. Suddenly unafraid of hardship, imprisonments and even death. These encounters with the Risen Jesus are extraordinary, and they say it all, truly.

And then S. Paul himself of course meets Jesus for the first time on the road to Damascus, so, from Jewish religious enforcer and Christian-hunter he becomes an Apostle of the same Good News.

With S. Paul setting out his stall today, it's a good moment to ask, **who is S. Paul?** How should we read him? How should we relate to him?

I don't know about you, but when I first started reading S. Paul I was often put off by his smugness, or rather 'lay it on with a trowel' descriptions of himself - *you may have had troubles, but I've had this and that and this and that*. He seemed rather too like that opiniated or 'hard work' family member that one always seems to get stuck chatting to family dos.

It took years for it to click and for me to be able to read S. Paul as he deserves. It's worth it, because now St Paul is a great friend and he's given me many gifts.

His writings are the earliest in the New Testament, of course. He gives us a relationship with the churches immediately following Pentecost. That's a great gift.

He is also all about **hope** and **glory**. St Paul writes as a man with his heart on his sleeve, possessed by a spirit enthusiasm and whole-hearted wonder. His conversion was a blinding light on the road to Damascus, and really he never got over that. His ministry and writing, the rest of his life, you get the impression of one still glowing with the blinding light of that moment. If nothing else, when we read any of S. Paul's words, we must hold in our mind: here is a man whose whole life is defined by a single moment, his everything is forged in the fire of the Damascus Rd encounter. If we keep that in our minds as we listen and read, we can't go too wrong.

Yes, he lays it on with a trowel, but he is an enthusiast.

Yes, he's rich meat sometimes, but his heart is full.

We all love our friends for and despite their faults. St Paul is a great friend to have. Not least, also, because he is also the first great theologian of the church's life. He knots together truths and themes and realities in a most wonderful way. In many ways **he lays out the fundamentals of what Jesus' death and Resurrection *actually mean***. Jesus died and rose again (all those events we'll profess in the Creed in a moment), it is Paul's ministry as our first great theologian that actually says what those events *did* and what they *mean*.

Finally, **S. Paul is living proof of today's Gospel**. A smug, secure, religious scholar. He knew the rules, and knew he was right. We all have a little Saul in us, a little of today's pharisee.

And because of what he saw on the road to Damascus he realised that it was all *fantasy*: his security, his life, his contentment with himself, his world view. And he put it all where it belongs: in the bin. He became the publican, and began a life discovering and sharing what it means to follow Jesus. What it means to truly seek a real life; that is a life in the light of Jesus' resurrection and waiting for His return.

Like the publican: no secure route map for life, no smug moral high-ground, just the beginnings of an honest relationship with God, and the beginnings of a truly *great* life, and by that, I mean a *real* one.

St Paul, pray for us and accompany us along the road.