

The 12th Sunday after Pentecost ~ Sunday, August 16, 2026

“Marks of the Early Church ~ Changed by Grace”

Psalm 67 Acts 26:12-20 Matthew 10:16-23

“And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.” (Acts 7:58)

“And Saul approved of his execution.” (Acts 8:1)

Saul witnessed Stephen praying for the forgiveness of his murderers, however, rather than being moved to _____, he became even more determined to _____ the Church.

“...ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.” (Acts 8:3)

And yet, within a very short time, the man who was trying to destroy the Church would become one of its greatest _____. This profound change in attitude was the direct result Saul’s dramatic _____ with the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus, as described in Acts 9.

He makes it clear that what happened on the Damascus road was so much more than just a change of opinion—it changed the entire _____ of his life.

The early Church wasn’t simply a group of people who’d adopted a new philosophy or joined a new religious organization. They were men and women who’d encountered the risen Jesus, received His _____, been filled with His Spirit, and discovered that they could never _____ the same way again.

Although this change can happen in different ways for different people, the heart of Christian conversion is always the same: we encounter Jesus, and He _____ us.

“If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Jesus doesn’t come into our lives to make a few minor adjustments—He comes to make us _____.

ENCOUNTERING THE RISEN JESUS

#1: An encounter with Jesus _____.

As far as Saul was concerned, he’d already made up his _____ about Jesus. Saul thought he was doing the _____ thing. He wasn’t acting out of religious

indifference, but religious _____.

“They have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.” (Romans 10:2)

He had zeal, sincerity, conviction, and religious education, but he was _____ about Jesus.

The Jesus Saul believed to be a dead, false Messiah was alive and speaking to him; and everything he thought he knew about Jesus had to be _____ in a single moment.

He so completely _____ Himself with His people that persecution against them is persecution against Him. Jesus doesn’t watch the suffering of His people from a safe distance. He knows. He _____. He identifies with them.

“See, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves...” (Matthew 10:1)

Saul deserved _____; he was persecuting Christ’s people and opposing the Gospel. However, instead of condemning him, Jesus stopped him on the road and _____ his error. He confronted him with the _____; and then offered him a _____ life.

We sometimes think of grace only as God _____ us, reassuring us, forgiving us, and telling us that we’re loved. Grace certainly does all those things, but sometimes it also _____ us. In fact, sometimes the most loving thing Jesus can do is show us that we’re _____.

We much prefer a Jesus who _____ everything we already think; a Jesus who agrees with all our opinions, endorses all our choices, and never _____ our priorities or assumptions. However, that Jesus would simply be a _____ of ourselves.

Jesus is _____. And because He’s Lord, we don’t get to remake Him according to our _____s. We come before Him and allow Him to remake us; to lovingly confront us with the truth—not to hurt or humiliate us, but to change us.

Before Saul could become the man God intended him to be, he had to face the truth, recognize he was wrong, and surrender his old understanding of Jesus. This is where every Christian life begins—with the recognition that Jesus is Lord, and we’re _____.

#2: An encounter with Jesus _____.

When Saul met Jesus on the road to Damascus, He didn’t just change Saul’s mind

about a theological issue; He changed the _____ of Saul's life.

Before Damascus, Saul had a very clear sense of who he was—he had an _____, accomplishments, and religious credentials.

“...if anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.” (Philippians 3:4-6)

He'd built his _____ around these things—that is, until he met Jesus, and everything changed.

“Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.” (Philippians 3:7-8)

Christianity isn't just about _____ Christian values and doctrine, attending church, reading the Bible, and saying our prayers. The heart of Christianity is _____ Jesus.

“This is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” (John 17:3)

“That I may know him...” (Philippians 3:10)

The Christian life isn't just about beginning with Jesus; it's about spending the rest of our lives _____ Him more deeply. And the more Paul knew Christ, the more everything else found its _____ place.

That's what conversion does—it changes the way we measure _____, what we consider important, where we find our identity, what we're willing to _____, and what we _____ for.

“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” (Galatians 2:20)

#3: An encounter with Jesus _____.

“Rise and stand on your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness...” (Acts 26:16)

When Jesus changes a life, He also changes its _____. That's why the Gospel

is about so much more than just being forgiven so we can go to heaven when we die. Jesus doesn't just save us _____ something; He saves us _____ something.

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works. For we are God's masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

“...to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.” (Acts 26:18-19)

And still he kept going. Why? Because he'd met Jesus. He knew who Jesus was. He knew what Jesus had _____ for him. And he knew what Jesus had _____ him to do. When we know that, suffering doesn't necessarily disappear, but it no longer gets the _____ word.

“The love of Christ compels us.” (2 Corinthians 5:14)

Because we know Jesus, we have something to _____—not just in the words we speak, but in the lives we live.

In fact, sometimes our greatest opportunities to bear witness come precisely when life is _____.

At the end of the day, all that Jesus asks of us is _____—wherever He's placed us, with whatever gifts He's given us, for however many days He gives us.

We may never preach before kings, plant churches across continents, or have our names in history books, but we can _____ the people God places around us. We can serve _____. We can speak about Jesus when He gives us the opportunity. And we can live in such a way that others catch a glimpse of _____ in us.



Our encounter with Him may not look like Paul's, but through His Word and by His Spirit, Jesus still meets us. He still _____ the things in us that need to change. He still calls us to _____ Him above everything else. And He still sends us into the world as His servants and witnesses.

May we never become so _____ with Christ that we stop being _____ by Him.