

Meditation Turning Points

The invitation today

Conversions refer to those encounters that change the way we see, the way we understand the world, the way we respond to others around us. Imaged as turning points the turns/curves along our journeys often lead in new, unexpected and surprising directions. Turning points in our lives may be significant life changing moments; they may well be more subtle shifts that happen over a period of time, over a lifetime – shifts in the way we see and understand so much around us. I have known both such 'turning points' in my life: a voice in the middle of a quiet evening that changed my career, changed where I'd live, the people I would meet – who I would send my life with. I know that persistent shift, transformation that slowly changed, my understanding and responses – in the past to parenting, to all of my close family relationships, in my work as I gained experience, confidence and direction in what I was doing. I noticed over time, significant shifts in my theological perspectives and my spiritual practices, all changing who I was, how I understood Holy Mystery, Wholly love at work in me, in others and in the world and still changing me through so many of the events of my living and my connections, old and new – the people I meet.

The authors, Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone in Active Hope How we Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy is a book about social and ecological change. The reader is guided on a journey of gratitude, interconnection, and ultimately transformation – conversion that leads to active hope in our lives and the world today. Their focus is based on three stories, imaged as choices we make; *Business as usual* that assumes there is little that needs changing in our world, a second story that identifies the *catastrophe of remaining within the first story*, and the third story that is embodied and lived out by all of us who realize that a conversion is necessary for the sake of the earth and seeks *new and creative human responses* to our present reality. This third story, they call the Great Turning and insists on a response to the question: *Which one do we want to put our energy behind?* (5) Careful about reading this book though, you may be converted!

Conversions, changes, turning points in our lives are what our story from Acts is about. We meet a man who was blind to God (that's Saul), turning on a Damascus roadway towards a new life in Christ; and then there is Ananias who comes to know more of the light breaking through hatred's

walls and grace-filled encouragement to do the right thing with grace. Eyes were opened once more and how different everything was in these two stories of conversion – of rebirth.

Saul's encounter with Christ on the Damascus road was I'd say, quite dramatic, a flashing of lights that puts Saul on the ground, a voice that calls Saul by name and directs him what to do next, and the ensuing loss of Saul's sight.

Saul's life-changing experience of the risen Christ near or in Damascus in Syria. transformed him from the persecutor of Jesus, to Paul, the apostle of Jesus to the Gentiles. For about twenty-five years thereafter, on foot and by sea, Paul traveled the eastern Roman Empire, mostly in Asia Minor and Greece, finally ending up in Rome, where he is executed. Paul preached and wrote out of a vivid sense of the presence of the Sacred that transformed his way of seeing for the rest of his life. "IN Christ" was a new identity for him that involved a new community and way of being.

His message (Crossan and Borg) challenged *the normalcy of civilization, then and now, with an alternative vision of how life on earth can and should be. The radical Paul, we are convinced, was a faithful follower of the radical Jesus. As a mystic, he lived in communion with God, a deep sense of oneness with God that was deep, close and intimate.*

Sometimes overlooked in the drama of Saul's experience of call is the story of Ananias' conversion, happening at the same time in a different town. His story of transformation may be like most of our experiences. Like the rest of the dispersed Christian community, Ananias had good cause to mistrust Saul. Saul had done "much evil" to the church. Yet, on the Damascus road, Saul had been "turned." So now Ananias is challenged to a turning of his own. He is to go to Saul and bring healing to this former enemy. Ouch! Underlying the story content itself, readers then and now hear an encounter with Christ whose call to reconciliation remains as timely for the church today as it was for Ananias.

The Spirit brings restoration to Saul through both the word "Brother Saul" and the touch of Ananias. An enemy has become a brother! The narrative ends with Saul's proclamation of Jesus. Both Saul and Ananias have had encounters with Christ that transform them and their communities. In fact this is the purpose, some researches have noted: "The primary purpose of visionary episodes in Acts is not to convert non-believers...but to commission prophets to missionary tasks – to be sent out – to bring about great turnings! And a great turning it is as Saul, now Paul

goes out beyond borders ever imagined in his times and the gospel of God's unconditional love known in and through Jesus, the Christ changes human history.

Encounter with God is very personal. Like the conversion story that Barbara Butler Bass shares in her book Grounded. *Read p277*.

Connection with our own lives: I invite you to reflect silently for a moment on these questions:

Saul's experience of turning was a radical transformation in response to an encounter with the divine.

What turning points (moments of transformation and change) in your life, have led to greater wholeness? in this congregation?

Ananias was also called to let go of his preconceived ideas for the sake of the community.

What preconceived ideas and prejudices might God be calling you, individually, us as church, our community and nation, to let go of?

Where is God calling us, individually and as church, to be agents of healing in places of brokenness?

We are people of a living spirit who calls and guides us toward greater inclusion, healing, and witness. Where is God calling us to be agents of healing in a broken and even dangerous world? In what situations do we need to have courage, trust God, and show up to be part of God's mission of reconciliation and peace? Like Ananias we are challenged to change – to let go of prejudice and see in new ways. – to be open to discover together ministries that may be risky but amazingly transformative.

The Season of Easter is about transformation and change. We can be assured, even as the early church came to know, that in the midst of uncertainty and risk, the risen Christ is present with us. The Spirit shows the way forward, offers new vision, new sight and fresh, illuminating (light-bulb –changing) insights, - sends us out - as individuals and as communities to witness to the grace and love of God.

Closing Invitation comes from Barbara Butler Bass (280):

Conversions are always experiences of God. The odd thing about my third conversion, however, is that it never ends. Every time I think I love the world enough, every time I think I experience God's presence with the earth enough, there is more.

May there always be 'more' loving, more presence, more caring, more] ongoing spiritual evolution that amounts to a revolution of faith in your lives.