

St Peter's, Mount Park Road, Ealing
Sunday 25th January 2015

Feast Day of the Conversion of St Paul

Each time we pray the Morning Office we begin with the prayer:

As we rejoice in the gift of this new day
So may the light of your presence, O God,
Set our hearts on fire with love for you Now
and for ever. Amen.

This is an invocation to Passionate Faith. Faith fired by the presence of God in our lives as we live each day in God's love.

Paul was a passionate man. He was passionate about his faith in a loving God; firstly as an honest and respectful Jew who lived by the Law of Moses and the Temple, and then as a follower of Jesus. In meeting Jesus on the Road to Damascus a new passion was born which brought the Good News of Jesus to the Gentile world. Paul offered us a passionate Gospel, built on the love of God through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Passion, unfortunately is not an Anglo-Saxon strong point. We do get passionate about some things but not necessarily in a public or demonstrative way. Yet, in some ways faith requires passion.

This week I was sat in a meeting of the Ealing Deanery Chapter, not normally a setting for passion, especially when we were sat in a room of the Acton Vale Community Centre, complete with metal grills on the windows, tacky decor and security locks everywhere. But here we met Mark, an Anglican priest living in a small Christian community on the estate. There are about seven of them. They meet for prayer and bible study. They are making themselves known in the community through service and serving the community. Not quite what is termed 'tentmaker' ministry but definitely hands-on, grass roots stuff. A group living and sharing the love of God in the community where they are. They have a gentle enthusiasm for the gospel in that very mixed community. It was quite inspiring.

In that same meeting we did an exercise identifying what other grass roots ministry was going on in the Deanery. We spread out a map and marked on it all the stuff we knew was happening in the churches, parishes and communities of Ealing. It too was inspiring to see what God was doing amongst us.

Admittedly we can't all go out and run or be part of small Christian communities like that. We are not all called to such ministry. We can be passionate about our faith, and the love God has for us and we for God. We can play our part in supporting the ministry of God in our Diocese as well as our parish and in so doing support and encourage others who are doing it.

We can make our life choices based upon our passion for the gospel; choices for our family, our work and our personal life, how we spend and where we spend it. We can use our skills to build up the body of Christ, giving of our talents and our time in sharing the Good News of Jesus.

We can also give generously of our money to pay — both for ministries here in the parish and for those ministries in places like Acton Vale.

In two weeks time we will be launching this year's Stewardship Campaign in which we will have an opportunity to respond passionately, creatively and generously to the work of God through the giving of our time, our talents and our money. You will be given information by members of the PCC which aim to help you make your decisions of how you can help. You will be invited to attend the Stewardship Sunday service on 8th March where you will be able to pledge to God your giving for the coming year.

My prayer is that we will receive God's fire in our hearts, that we may burn with his passionate love and respond creatively and generously to His work in our community through your church.