

## ***The Third Day* by Tom Berlin**

### **Chapter 5: *Paul***

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I am a collector of Children's stories. One of my all-time favorites is *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* by Dr. Suess. It is a favorite for lots of reasons, but the main reason is that it is a story of transformation.

We meet the Grinch who is a tumbled up knot of sadness, grumpiness and meanness who cannot stand the thought of hearing other's joy on Christmas, so the Grinch devises an evil plan to steal Christmas. While he is successful in taking the stuff related to Christmas including the last can of who hash he discovers he can't steal the spirit of joy and love that Christmas brings. And the Grinch is transformed-his icy heart grew 2 sizes, he returns the stuff, he becomes part of the community and even carves the roast beast. The Grinch is transformed from the inside out. He does a complete 180. It is a powerful children's story about transformation.

All through our Lenten journey, Bishop Berlin has been guiding us through the transformation that occurs in the lives of people when the resurrected Christ appears to them. It is clear through the biblical narrative that anyone who encounters Jesus is changed, transformed forever. And for me, the biggest transformation of all occurs in the life of the Pharisee Saul later known as Paul.

Saul grew up in a devout Jewish family, studied under an esteemed Rabbi, and after his studies became a Pharisee. The Pharisees were strict followers of the laws and customs of Judaism, and to do this well they set themselves apart from the normal ways of life to be able to focus wholly on following and studying God's laws. Saul pursued a high level of religious obedience and was zealous in his opposition to Jesus.

If anyone could be considered a grinch related to his treatment of followers of the way of Jesus, it was Saul. Saul actively participated in the persecution of the first Christians. He witnessed and condoned the stoning of Stephen, and is on his way to Damascus with papers to arrest and persecute followers of Jesus when the Resurrected Christ appears to him. This direct encounter with Jesus is described in scripture as a light and voice from heaven that was Jesus speaking. Jesus calls Saul out by name "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" And answers Saul's question; "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." And tells Saul what he must do.

This encounter with resurrected Jesus changes the whole trajectory of Saul's life. He is never the same. He has been transformed. Bishop Berlin describes this pivotal moment like this: "Once a devout Pharisee who was thoroughly convinced that the claim of a risen Jesus was an evil rumor, Paul was transformed into a Christian evangelist willing to boldly testify of his own

encounter with the resurrected Jesus and declare, “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead.”” (page 89)

Paul becomes the greatest Christian missionary the world has ever known. He traveled all around the ancient world debating in favor of Jesus in the synagogues, performing miracles, inviting Gentiles to follow the way of Christ, planting churches, mentoring early Christian leaders, enduring persecution and imprisonment and writing letters to the early Christians that are persevered for us as a large chunk of the New Testament. Paul’s body of writing- his letters, taught the early church what the resurrection of Jesus meant and what it looked like to be people of the resurrection. Paul understood and proclaimed the transformation that Christ could bring now and the hope of eternal life to come. His letters are a testimony to the power of the resurrection, the promise that death is not the end, the assurance of God’s love for all humanity.

In his writing, Paul offers us a clear picture of what a life transformed by Christ looks like, a deep understanding that God is still at work in each of us and in the world and emphasizes that God is with us and for us. 2 Corinthians 5:17 reads, “*So then if anyone is in Christ, that person is part of the new creation. The old things have gone away, and look, new things have arrived!* (CEB)” I think these words sum up Paul’s story and what Jesus resurrection means for us. Complete transformation. The old is gone, the new is here.

This is the promise of our encounters with the resurrected Jesus—we will be transformed. The old is gone, the new is here. We will not be the same. We are transformed from the inside out; our hearts grow a couple of sizes every time. This transformation work is the work of a lifetime.

Paul’s encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus was only the beginning of what God would do in him and how Paul would continue to work on becoming more and more like Jesus and writing and preaching and teaching to help others do the same.

How has God been at work in your transformation? How are you working towards a transformed life? What old things need to be gone in you so that new things can spring up? If anyone is in Christ, that person is part of the new creation. The old things have gone away, and look, new things have arrived! May your transformation be as visible as the Grinch’s and as deep as Paul’s. May you be transformed by your own encounters with Jesus. Amen.