

Advent, Day 5
Read Philippians 3:4-11

Thursday, December 6

“But whatever were gains to me, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.” Philippians 3:7

SURPRISE!!

I was thirteen and a typical teenager. I was not particularly thrilled with the prospect of spending my birthday with my parents tagging along. It helped that my best friend, Bill, had been invited to be part of the evening of dinner and a movie. But with my parents....Ah, well, I guess I could make the best of it.

Dad needed to stop by his shop for something on the way. We all had to tag along. I was surprised when Bill said that he had never seen dad's shop and wanted to go in if it was all right. Dad said that I could show Bill around while he took care of whatever he was there to do. Grumbling, I got out of the car and went to the door.

The blast of *Surprise!!* which greeted me when I turned on the lights caused me to take a few steps backwards. Dad's shop had been transformed. Gone were the rolls of wire and shelves full of equipment. Instead there were balloons and a punch bowl and music blaring from a stereo and about twenty of my friends, including the longed-after Raylene Pinkston, who came right up to me and asked if I would dance with her. You could have knocked me over with a feather. I had no idea my parents could be so cool.

Saul was on the road to Damascus. A man on a mission. His goal was to ferret out any of the so-called 'Christians' who were threatening to upset the balance of power in the faith of Judaism, and to bring them to justice before the court of the Sanhedrin. The charge would be heresy, and Saul was the right man for the job. He was a Pharisee's Pharisee, so well-versed in the law and so intent on dispensing justice that his name caused fear among the tiny Christian community.

Then there was a blinding light. And a voice.

“Saul, why are you persecuting me?”

Saul was left helpless and blind by the incident. He was offered relief and help not from the Jewish authorities in Damascus, but by the hand of one of those whom he had come to punish. It was then that Paul's conversion began in earnest.

C.S. Lewis has written a wonderful book that I recommend to you. It is called *Surprised by Joy*. A great book about the wonder of discovery that comes to those who are willing to listen and be changed by the grace of God.

Saul was surprised by grace. It wasn't anything that he had expected. It changed him completely.

But then, grace is always surprising. If it weren't surprising, it wouldn't be grace. Grace is amazing. It is surprising. It always catches us off-guard and can lead us into some places that we never expected to find ourselves.

In this season, open yourself up to the amazing grace of God.

You may be surprised by what God can do.