

On Wednesday night great sobs erupted in the Taylor family.  
On Thursday night great sounds of joy erupted in the Taylor family.

You see, on Wednesday, two favourite children's toys, squirrel and bear got lost. On Thursday, squirrel and bear, were found. Great rejoicing and mighty giggles of relieved laughter, echoed down the Taylor's hallway.

Squirrel and bear were retrieved from the washing basket, Were they had been placed during a game of hide and seek. Squirrel and bear were held aloft to be paraded around the house, triumphantly presented to mother and father and sister.

But the vital, vital theological question is this: When were these children's toys, when were squirrel and bear converted?

This vital, vital, theological question. If squirrel and bear were to give their testimony, would they point to 6:53 pm, Thursday, 29<sup>th</sup> September as their moment of being found?

Or would they note the tears of intercession on Wednesday, the thoughtful probing questions of Mother Taylor on the Thursday, followed by the guiding companionship of Father Taylor.

Is conversion an event, or a process? Does God find us in one momentous moment, in which we can name the time and date, or is God quietly finding us step by step?

And the answer? If I were to ask you what the best Bible example of conversion was, you would most likely tell me it was Paul on the Damascus Road.

And for the apostle Paul, his conversion was an event, a momentous moment, a specific time and specific place; An event that was sudden, An event that was singular, An event was emotional, An event that instantly transformed his life.

Listen to Acts 9:

<sup>3</sup>He set off. When he got to the outskirts of Damascus, he was suddenly dazed by a blinding flash of light. <sup>4</sup>As he fell to the ground, he heard a voice: "Saul, Saul, why are you out to get me?"

<sup>5</sup>He said, "Who are you, Master?"

"I am Jesus, the One you're hunting down. <sup>6</sup>I want you to get up and enter the city. In the city you'll be told what to do next."

For Saul, conversion is an event. One great big bang of insight and of turning and of transformation, that affect who he is, how he relates to Jesus and what he does with his life within his culture.

And so when Christians use the apostle Paul on the Damascus Road, they will see conversion as the event that launches our Christian life. Conversion as saying yes to Jesus by a simple prayer of repentance and faith.

And so back to squirrel and bear. When where they converted? We answer that question, by comparing their conversion with Paul's conversion. Squirrel and bear, like Paul, were converted, At one time -- 6:53 pm, Thursday, 29<sup>th</sup> September; In one place --- Taylor's washing basket.

With great emotional joy and we pray it transforms their lives. That's the apostle Paul.

But. But, that's not the only Biblical conversion story. What, for instance, happens with the disciple Peter?

And for Peter, conversion is a process. Unlike bear and squirrel, it's very hard to point to one momentous moment of insight and turning and transformation in the disciple Peter's conversion.

In Matthew 4: Peter says yes to following Jesus;

<sup>17</sup> *Jesus started preaching . "Change your life. God's kingdom is here."*

<sup>18</sup> *Walking along the beach of Lake Galilee, Jesus saw two brothers: Peter and Andrew. They were fishing, throwing their nets into the lake. It was their regular work. <sup>19</sup>Jesus said to them, "Come with me. I'll make a new kind of fisherman out of you. I'll show you how to catch men and women instead of fish."*

Peter starts following Jesus. Then in Matthew 16: Peter gets the words right.

<sup>15</sup> *Jesus pressed them, "Who do you say I am?"*

<sup>16</sup> *Simon Peter said, "You're the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God."*

<sup>17</sup> *Jesus came back, "God bless you, Simon Peter! You didn't get that answer out of books or from teachers. My Father in heaven, God himself, let you in on this secret of who I really am."*

But 7 verses later, we realise that Peter might have the right words, but he's got the wrong ideas about God. Matthew 16:

<sup>21</sup> *Then Jesus made it clear to his disciples that it was now necessary for him [as God] to go to Jerusalem, submit to an ordeal of suffering at the hands of the religious leaders, be killed, and then on the third day be raised up alive. <sup>22</sup>Peter took him in hand, protesting, "Impossible, Master! That can never be!"*

<sup>23</sup> *But Jesus didn't swerve. "Peter, get out of my way ... You have no idea how God works."*

Heavy stuff. Peter, you might have the right words, but you've got the wrong ideas.

So when was Peter converted? Follow me, or You're the messiah, or "Peter you've got no idea how God works." And Peter gets more puzzling. Because then, front of a crowd, with the pressure on, he denies that he knows Jesus.

So Matthew 26: 69, the Servant girl pointing at him; *"You were with Jesus the Galilean."*

<sup>70</sup> *In front of everybody there, Peter denied it. "I don't know what you're talking about."*

Is that conversion behaviour? In front of a crowd, with the pressure on, to say, "No, not me. I don't know Jesus.

But then Peter is called again. Or is that converted again? Or is Peter finally a Christian in John 21? Peter has gone back to the Lake and gone back to fishing. And Jesus turns up. Just like in Matthew, just like the first time Jesus says follow.

Jesus is in the in the restoration business. Three times Jesus asks Peter if he loves him. Three times Peter says yes. Three times Peter is given a task, to love people.

So when was Peter truly converted? Was it when Jesus said "Follow me?" or when Peter said "You are the Messiah" Was it when Jesus said "Peter you have no idea how God works" or when Peter denied Jesus or when Jesus said "Feed my sheep." And what part of Peter was being converted when in Acts 10 Peter realized that Christianity was bigger his cultural upbringing.

The disciple Peter's not like the apostle Paul. You can't push Peter into one big momentous event.

Peter shows us the conversion is a process. That there are many, many moments of insight and of turning and of transformation, that affect who he is, how he relates to Jesus and what he does with his life within his culture.

While Paul was sudden, Peter was slow; While Paul was singular, Peter was a many.  
While Paul was emotional, Peter was feet, then words, then ideas and finally lifestyle and behaviour.  
While Paul was instantly transformed, Peter's was a life-long journey.

So back to my original question. That vital, vital theological question: When were squirrel and bear converted? And the answer is both. Conversion is both an event and a process.

So what does this mean? **Firstly, that God converts.** Paul was twisted up with anger. He was a man driven by hatred. God changed him. Peter needed a life direction. He was filled with the wrong ideas. He was choked by shame and guilt. God changed him.

Today, you might be here full of anger and hatred. You might be lacking a life direction. You might be choked with shame and guilt.

Christian message is that God converts. God can change you.

**Secondly, all conversions are unique.** We are not all Paul's. We are not all changed dramatically, emotionally, in one moment. Some of slip quietly into God's arms.

We are born into a Christian family and make lots of little decisions to follow the God of our parents. We attend a Bible Study group and at some point start acting, thinking, praying as a Christian. We are Christian, but suddenly realise that we have some wrong ideas about God. We thought God was about meeting my needs, when God is about serving each other. So we spend our whole lives learning how following Jesus applies to all areas of our lives – words and ideas and actions.

We are not all Paul's – dramatic and emotional.

Equally, we are not all Peter's. Some of us have dramatic encounters with God. We have a mystical revelation that totally, instantly changes our life. It is emotional and totally life changing.

Peter and Paul. Both converted. Both reminding us that each of our conversions is unique.

**Third application, What does a church look like, that offers evangelism as both event and process? But that's next week.**

I started with squirrel and bear. And asked the question; when were they converted? Looked at the apostle Paul and the disciple Peter. Suggested that evangelism is both event and process.

Which means firstly, that God converts. If you want help to meet the God who changes people, Talk to person who brought you or to some you trust, or come to sit and the front and their will be people to talk and prayer with you.

Secondly, all conversions are unique. Take some time today to thank God for his unique work in your life, whether event or process. Remember not to impose your unique experience of God on others.