

People like us

**Sermon for the Feast of St Peter & St Paul, Apostles,
Sunday 29th June 2025 – Holy Communion at 8.30am**

Readings [Acts 12.1–11](#), [Matthew 16.13–19](#)

Today we celebrate St Peter. We have heard in the Gospel about his moment of insight into who Jesus really is and, in our first reading, of his remarkable escape from prison.

But we're celebrating not just Peter but also Paul, and we've heard nothing about at all about him. And Paul might say, 'Yeah, I'm used to that.' In one of his letters in the New Testament, Paul complains that he gets worse treatment than the other apostles ([1 Corinthians 9.5-6](#)), and he has issues with Peter himself.

I'm not suggesting the Peter and Paul are the Gallagher brothers of the early church; they are more like the duo we remember in this 80th anniversary year of the end of the Second World War who led Britain through those years, Winston Churchill and Clement Attlee: a powerful pair of comrades who had big differences of conviction and style.

At the start of the church's story, Peter is the main man. We hear this morning how he is the 'rock' (which is what his nickname 'Peter' means) on which Jesus will build his church. And, despite his considerable talent for mucking things up, nothing quite dislodges Peter from that position as the foundational apostle.

So when Paul becomes convinced that Jesus wants him as an apostle too, he has some ground to make up: Peter knew Jesus in the flesh, Paul never did – and he spent some time persecuting the followers of Jesus; Peter was among the first to experience the risen Jesus, Paul admits he was the last: like the runt of the litter, he says ([1 Corinthians 15.3-9](#)).

Now these two are saints, official heroes of the church, and the church has traditionally had a certain way of presenting its saints. Look at statues or stained glass windows and you see Peter, holding the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and Paul, holding the sword of faith – grand, serene, no hint of either

of them having a story, and certainly no hint of the sparks that fly between them.

You get no sense of this either from the official selection of Bible readings for today. On this their joint feast day, you might expect to hear the one part of the New Testament where one of our heroes talks specifically about the other, but we don't. Why? Well, here it is; see what you think. It's Paul writing, in his (rather spicy) letter to the Galatians:

When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood self-condemned.

The argument is over whether Jewish Christians and non-Jewish Christians can break bread together (as we do this morning). And Peter, says Paul, flip-flops, first doing one thing and then the other, according to who he's with. Paul accuses him of being weak, inconsistent, even hypocritical ([Galatians 2.11-14](#) Paul calls him 'Cephas', the Aramaic equivalent of the Greek name Petros).

So, behind the saintly official image, we find two very human figures who disagreed. Now saints are people who followed Jesus and who we are supposed to look at so that we can follow Jesus better. So how can these two help? Two things.

First, they show us that there never was a golden age when all Christian people agreed about everything. God is just too big for us all to have the same ideas about how to serve God best and how best to spread the rumour of God's love in our world – as we may be about to discover.

We are renewing our Mission Action Plan, which will set our course for what we think God is asking of us for the next several years. You have a part to play in this (follow this [link](#)) and we should not be surprised if quite different views emerge. Peter and Paul show that God can use our differences really well.

A second thing they also show us stems from something they have in common: they both messed up. Peter denied that he knew Jesus when the heat was on ([Luke 22.54-62](#)), Paul persecuted Jesus' followers, yet – again – God

used both of them really well. And that leads us to ask, 'If God did that with those two characters, what might God do with me?'

This is a good question to ask just now, because we are in a season of vocation. Yesterday, forty men and women were ordained as deacons at our cathedral, dedicated to one of today's saints, St Paul's. And on Thursday our own Lydia McLean was ordained as a priest. She presides at the eucharist for the first time at 11 o'clock today.

If God can do that with them, what might God want to do with me?

Perhaps God wants to lead you along a similar path to Lydia's, into some public ministry; or perhaps along quite a different one: all paths are equally precious when it's God doing the leading.

What might God want to do with me?

'Me?' you may say, 'No, not me. It's not that I sometimes muck things up, it's that my circumstances just rule me out.'

Paul knew about circumstances. In one of his most revealing writings, his second letter to the Corinthians, he talks about having 'a thorn in flesh'. It was some physical disadvantage, possibly very limited eyesight (there is evidence of that in his letters) but we can't be sure.

Whatever it was, he tells us that three times he asked the Lord to free him from it. No doubt he said that he could do so much more for God if God could just do that one thing for him. But, he tells us, the Lord replied,

My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.

[\(2 Corinthians 12.7-10\)](#)

Peter and Paul. Weak, inconsistent, grappling with troubles. In other words, people like us, people who show us what you or I might become, if we can own our weaknesses and so release in our lives the power of God.