

Sunday 28th June – Morning Worship
Celebrating St Peter's Day

Opening Hymn – Glorious things of thee are spoken

GLORIOUS things of thee are spoken,
Zion, city of our God;
He, whose word cannot be broken,
Formed thee for His own abode.
On the Rock of Ages founded,
What can shake thy sure repose?
With salvation's walls surrounded,
Thou may'st smile at all thy foes.

See, the streams of living waters,
Springing from eternal love,
Well supply thy sons and daughters,
And all fear of want remove:
Who can faint, while such a river
Ever flows their thirst to assuage?
Grace which, like the Lord, the giver,
Never fails from age to age.

Round each habitation hovering
See the cloud and fire appear
For a glory and a covering
Showing that the Lord is near.
Thus deriving from their banner
Light by night and shade by day –
Safe, they feed upon the manna
Which he gives them when they pray.

Saviour, if in Zion's city
I, through grace, a member am,
Let the world deride or pity,
I will glory in Thy name:
Fading is the worldling's pleasure,
All his boasted pomp and show;
Solid joys and lasting treasure
None but Zion's children know.

Confession

Father eternal, giver of light and grace,
we have sinned against you and against our neighbour,
in what we have thought,
in what we have said and done,
through ignorance, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We have wounded your love,
and marred your image in us.
We are sorry and ashamed,
and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us,
forgive us all that is past;
and lead us out from darkness
to walk as children of light. Amen

Psalm 125

- 1 Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion,
which cannot be moved, but stands fast for ever.
- 2 As the hills stand about Jerusalem,
so the Lord stands round about his people,
from this time forth for evermore.
- 3 The sceptre of wickedness shall not hold sway
over the land allotted to the righteous,
lest the righteous turn their hands to evil.
- 4 Do good, O Lord, to those who are good,
and to those who are true of heart.
- 5 Those who turn aside to crooked ways
the Lord shall take away with the evildoers;
but let there be peace upon Israel.

Collect for St Peter

Almighty God,
who inspired your apostle Saint Peter
to confess Jesus as Christ and Son of the living God:
build up your Church upon this rock,
that in unity and peace it may proclaim one truth
and follow one Lord, your Son our Saviour Christ,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Readings

Acts 12:1-11

About that time King Herod laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church. He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword. After he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. (This was during the festival of Unleavened Bread.) When he had seized him, he put him in prison and handed him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending to bring him out to the people after the Passover. While Peter was kept in prison, the church prayed fervently to God for him.

The very night before Herod was going to bring him out, Peter, bound with two chains, was sleeping between two soldiers, while guards in front of the door were keeping watch over the prison. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He tapped Peter on the side and woke him, saying, 'Get up quickly.' And the chains fell off his wrists. The angel said to him, 'Fasten your belt and put on your sandals.' He did so. Then he said to him, 'Wrap your cloak around you and follow me.' Peter went out and followed him; he did not realize that what was happening with the angel's help was real; he thought he was seeing a vision. After they had passed the first and the second guard, they came before the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went outside and walked along a lane, when suddenly the angel left him. Then Peter came to himself and said, 'Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hands of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.'

Matthew 16:13-19

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.'

Sermon – Rev Paul Day

I want to begin today by telling a short story. It's one I have told before, and so I apologise if you have heard it already – but I think it's worth repeating. It's a story that the author Neil Gaiman tells about a conversation he had at a conference he was attending.

Some years ago, I was lucky enough invited to a gathering of great and good people: artists and scientists, writers and discoverers of things. And I felt that at any moment they would realise that I didn't qualify to be there, among these people who had really done things.

On my second or third night there, I was standing at the back of the hall, while a musical entertainment happened, and I started talking to a very nice, polite, elderly gentleman about several things, including our shared first name. And then he pointed to the hall of people, and said words to the effect of, "I just look at all these people, and I think, what the heck am I doing here? They've made amazing things. I just went where I was sent."

And I said, "Yes. But you were the first man on the moon. I think that counts for something."

And I felt a bit better. Because if Neil Armstrong felt like an imposter, maybe everyone did. Maybe there weren't any grown-ups, only people who had worked hard and also got lucky and were slightly out of their depth, all of us doing the best job we could, which is all we can really hope for.

I wonder if you have ever felt like that. A bit of an imposter. Thinking you are not really qualified or experienced or skilled enough to be doing something that you are doing. I think it's a common feeling for many of us. It's known as imposter syndrome.

Tomorrow is the feast day of St Peter.

In normal years this is the season of the year when ordinations tend to take place in recognition of Peter's role in the church – as declared in that gospel reading. You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church.

Peter the rock.
Only he wasn't.

The reading today cuts off at verse 19. If we had read just a couple of verses later we would see a somewhat different picture of Peter. Jesus begins to talk about what is going to happen in Jerusalem – his arrest, trial and death. Peter says – God forbid it, this must never happen to you. And Jesus responds by telling Peter “Get behind me Satan- you are setting your mind on human things, not divine things.

Some rock on which to build the church.

Last Sunday Gill spoke about the challenges of being a disciple, a follower of Jesus. It is never going to be easy; there will be crosses to carry; there will be difficulties to face; there will be times when things go wrong. But we need to press on - Jesus asks for total commitment.

This is a high calling, and I suspect many of us feel unworthy of it. Perhaps a bit like Peter felt unworthy of his calling to be a rock.

One of the great things about the midweek reflections that members of the ministry team have been giving over the past couple of months is that they have given insights into the great characters of scripture, and we have begun to see that they all have their faults and flaws and skeletons in their cupboards. We have begun to see that perhaps they are not so great after all.

Paul – with his background of being a persecutor of the church; with the hints of his short temper – we read of a sharp disagreement between him and Barnabas over whether Mark should go with them on one of their journeys.

Mary Magdalene - with her baggage of the seven demons – whatever they may have been

Thomas – with his questioning and reluctance to believe what others told him

Abraham – with his habit of telling half truths to get himself out of sticky situations; and his tendency to do things his own way when he felt God was being too slow

Jacob – with his scheming, cheating and plotting; with his favouritism causing untold harm and mistrust in his family

And Peter of course. Denying that he even knew Jesus; often speaking and acting before he had time to engage his brain.

All characters with history; with faults and failings. All in some way imposters. Not fully up to the task; none perhaps truly deserving of their calling; none who would have got through a rigorous selection process for their role.

And yet all of them heroes. All of them doing amazing things with God and for God. All great examples of faith and trust.

Paul – witnessing to the gospel across the whole of the middle east; facing up to opposition, torture, arrest and beatings.

Mary Magdalene – being the first person to see the risen Jesus and tell other of the news.

Thomas – declaring for all to hear – My Lord and My God

Abraham – trusting in God when called to leave his home and follow into the unknown; trusting in God when called to sacrifice his son; known as the friend of God

Jacob – with his vision of heaven and of God; with his struggle with God at the Jabbok; with his change of name to Israel – the one who has struggled with God and prevailed.

And of course Peter. Walking on water; proclaiming the message on that first day

of Pentecost; seeing God's vision that the gospel was for the whole world, not just for the Jews.

All of these great characters had high points and low points. All had to learn from their pasts and step forward into their futures, knowing they wouldn't get everything right. All learned new things about themselves – discovered they could do things they had never anticipated. All knew what they were called to do and where they were called to go. All showed their trust in God.

In our churches the last few months have been a tremendous roller coaster for all of us. We have had to learn new skills. We have had to step forward not quite sure of what we were doing or where we were going. We have got some things wrong. We have made mistakes. In many ways we have proved ourselves inadequate for the tasks, but in other ways we have risen to the occasion.

One thing is certain though, if we had waited till we felt we were ready and skilled and confident to do these new things we would have done nothing. We would have lost out. We would not have experienced or known the way God has been with us and guiding us and teaching us over these past few months.

As it is we now have a community who worship regularly using YouTube and over telephone lines; who communicate and have meetings using 'zoom' and other video facilities; who are more committed and supportive of each other than ever before; who have stepped forward into new areas and new ways; who have learned of God's faithfulness and love; who have been richly blessed.

And now, as we look to the future we see a hazy, uncertain future.

So many questions that we don't know the answers to.

When can we get together to worship again?

What will that worship be like?

Will it be like it used to be?

Will we all be able to get together?

How will we keep in touch with those who cannot get to the buildings?

I don't know the answer to any of those questions. – in fact I don't even know all the questions we will be facing up to. I don't feel adequate to face these new challenges. I'm tempted to shout out that it's all too difficult.

But I know God is calling us onwards. And that involves taking risks. It will almost certainly mean going down some blind alleys, getting things wrong and doing things in inefficient ways. But it will also mean being surprised and encouraged when we see what God can do through us and with us.

When we look at ourselves as followers of Jesus it's all too easy to get fixed on the negative things, those things that make us feel like imposters. But we have a great God who is with us, leading us on, giving us strength. The same God who was with Paul, Mary Magdalene, Abraham, Jacob, Peter and all those biblical heroes. That same God is guiding us and is alongside us as we step into the unknown and uncertain future.

And I would like to finish with the prayer that Sarah used at the end of her reflection on Peter.

Loving God. There are times when we feel like Peter, asked to do a task for which we feel inadequate, confident that others would do it better. Help us to understand that we do not always know our own strengths, and to take up the challenge confident in your guidance and support. Amen

Final hymn – Father I place into your hands

Father, I place into your hands
The things I cannot do,
Father, I place into your hands
The things that I've been through.
Father, I place into your hands
The way that I should go,
For I know I always can trust you.

Father, I place into your hands
My friends and family.
Father, I place into your hands
The things that trouble me.
Father, I place into your hands
The person I would be,
For I know I always can trust you.

Father, we love to see your face,
We love to hear your voice.
Father, we love to sing your praise
And in your name rejoice.
Father, we love to walk with you
And in your presence rest,
For we know we always can trust you.

Father, I want to be with you
And do the things you do.
Father, I want to speak the words
That you are speaking too.
Father, I want to love the ones
That you will draw to you,
For I know that I am one with you.