


Sts Peter and Paul, Year C – St John the Evangelist  
29 June 2025



Acts 12: 1–11 / Psalm 125 / 2 Timothy 4.6–8, 17, 18 / Matthew 16.13–19

Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah!

 In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit – *Amen*

**T**HIS MORNING'S READINGS feature a sort of 'Peter and Paul's Greatest Hits' album, though it's tilted in favour of St Peter. The Apostle of Rome gets a thrilling prison escape *and* his confession of faith in 'the Messiah, the Son of the living God', whereas St Paul only gets his weary, elderly retrospective 'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.' Before we just settle for these scriptural bangers, though, I'd like to read another passage from Scripture, and (for fairness) I'll draw it from Paul's letters.

The scene I have in mind comes from the Epistle to the Galatians, where Paul — distinctly angrily — tells the Galatians about a meeting he had with St Peter. It sounds as though he had already told them about it when he was teaching to them in person. 'But when Cephas [that's an Aramaic version of "Peter"] came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood self-condemned; for until certain people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But after they came, he drew back and kept himself separate for fear of the circumcision faction. And the other Jews joined him in this hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not acting consistently with the truth of the gospel, I said to

Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?” *In your face, St Peter!*

The conflict in Antioch reminds our veneration of these apostolic champions that our faith and our church have an elasticity that includes *both* sides of a hot conflict between their two visions of what faithfulness entails. St Paul presents Peter as taking the side of a Torah-observant faith that cherishes the traditions and identity of Israel’s Law. We might think of him, this morning, as a spokesman for good old British values, tea and bulldogs and empire and St George and ‘Jerusalem’ at the Last Night of the Proms. St Paul advocates acceptance of Gentile disciples *as we are*. He blasts Peter for not being *inclusive* enough, as though we Gentiles were second-class disciples.

Now, at this point, we could devise a way of taking the story about Paul and Peter trading harsh words with one another, and smooth it out with a happy ending, giving one another what Paul calls ‘the right hand of fellowship’ (please excuse his unselfconscious bias against left-handed people). We *want* there to be a way of resolving, *happily* resolving, the first head-to-head confrontation we know about within the apostolic company. But that desire for a happy ending risks hiding some of the most important lessons Peter and Paul have to teach us.

First, we should remember this morning just how little we *know, for sure*, about the apostles and their ministry. For instance: we have no clue what St Peter said *back* to St Paul after Paul called him a hypocritical traditionalist. Maybe Peter asked how he had the gall to shout down the apostle to whom Jesus said ‘you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it’; or maybe he admitted that he’d been in the wrong, and humbly asked Paul to accept his apology. (Actually, I think we can rule that alternative out, because, knowing Paul, he’d have been sure to tell

us if he prevailed over Peter.) We have *some* family traditions about the early church, but not medical records and VAR (video apostolic referee).

Second, the two *best known, most honoured* proclaimers of the gospel of peace and justice had a proper dust-up with one another. God's peace may involve many things, but I doubt that it involves calling your co-worker, the future Pope, to whom Jesus entrusted the keys to the kingdom, a two-faced fake. Peter and Paul had theological views that were in some ways *opposite* to each other — and not only do we have *room* for both of them in the church, but they're *leading* figures in the emergence of our faith. So when we're tempted to force out the wrong kind of people, remember that a church that stretched far enough to include both Paul and Peter may be expansive enough to encompass us *and* those whom *we* regard as two-faced fakers.

Third, we should bear in mind that not only are Paul and Peter both *included*, they're both *heroes*. They share *today* in the church calendar, but they also have their own particular days — the feast of the Chair of St Peter, and the feast of the Conversion of St Paul. *Fr Charles* doesn't have a feast day; our Wardens Margaret and David don't have feast days of *their* own; but Peter and Paul get two *each*! And they were leaders of opposing parties, as Paul suggests when he scolds the Corinthians for saying 'So, *I* belong to Peter!' 'Well, *I* belong to Paul!' 'No,' Paul says, 'don't let *anyone* boast about human leaders. For *all things* are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Peter or the world or life or death or the present or the future — all belong to you, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.'

Which also means that when, one of these days, we learn the identity of a new Team Rector, I am certain many of us will be excited by our new leader; but our Rector will *not* be exactly who some *others* hope. This is a big parish, among whom we find people who like the prayerbook, people who like contemporary language services, some

who like classic hymns and some who like praise songs, or *whatever*. The church expands to make room for all of us — and just as you opened your hearts to me when I came to you a year and a half ago, so I pray that we all, a big church with a big heart, with *many* big hearts, will open your hearts for a new Rector whoever they turn out to be.

With St Peter whom Christ blessed, yet who denied him on Good Friday; with St Paul who humbled himself to receive Christ's yoke but who quarrelled with practically *everyone*; with rectors past and rectors to come, with vicars, volunteers, music directors, and even an associate priest or two, *all* belong to you, and and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God!

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit —

**Amen**

Almighty God,  
whose blessed apostles Peter and Paul  
glorified you in their death as in their life:  
grant that your Church,  
inspired by their teaching and example,  
and made one by your Spirit,  
may ever stand firm upon the one foundation,  
Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Acts 12:1–11

About that time King Herod laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church. <sup>2</sup>He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword. <sup>3</sup>After he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. (This was during the festival of Unleavened Bread.) <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>While Peter was kept in prison, the church prayed fervently to God for him.

<sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup>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.' <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>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.'

Psalm: 125

Response: The Lord has done great things for us and therefore we rejoiced.

When the Lord turned again the fortunes of Zion;  
then were we like men restored to life.  
Then was our mouth filled with laughter:  
And our tongue with singing.    Response

Turn again our fortunes O Lord:  
as the streams return to the dry south.  
Those that sow in tears:  
shall reap with songs of joy.    Response

2 Tim

<sup>6</sup>As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. <sup>7</sup>I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. <sup>8</sup>From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing. <sup>17</sup>But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. <sup>18</sup>The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Matt 16:13–19

<sup>13</sup>Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' <sup>14</sup>And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' <sup>15</sup>He said to them, 'But who do you say

that I am?’ 16Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’ 17And 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. 18And 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. 19I 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.’