

## Trinity 11: You are Peter

St. Brandon's

Romans 12 1:8, Matthew 16: 13-20

23 August 2020

**Lord, speak to us now through your Word, that we may hear you and respond. Amen**

And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church.

Before I moved to Durham last September to train at Cranmer Hall, I lived in Redcar. Maybe you have been there? Perhaps not. I don't really expect it is the top destination for a beach day when travelling from Durham, not with the delights of Tynemouth and the Northumberland coast close at hand.

Redcar began life as a fishing village but grew with the rise of the steelworks and chemical industry. It's not a beautiful town in many respects but it does have a lovely, long stretch of beach and there are still one or two fishing boats.

I came to faith when I began attending St Peter's Church, Redcar nearly 20 years ago now so I have heard and thought quite a lot about Peter and those powerful words of commission,

You are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church.

At St Peter's church, where the sandstone tower provided a guiding image for fishing boats navigating the nearby rocks off the coastline, we often focused on how he was a fisherman who left everything he knew to follow Jesus and how his many mistakes offered encouragement to us in our walk of faith.

As I have reflected on the reading for today though, I have been more struck by the pronouns used in the phrase: **I** will build **MY** church.

What an amazing act of grace that was and is.

God, through his Son, Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit, builds his church on and in and through flawed yet faithful human beings like Peter, a process, ongoing throughout the ages, in times of persecution, oppression, war and disunity which continue with us today.

From my perspective it's not exactly a safe bet. It doesn't seem the best way to lay foundations, to start with someone so abounding in doubts and failings, of limited understanding and insufficient faith to feed the multitudes or walk on water.

I imagine God's exasperation over the centuries, as he hears the cries of his people falling short over and over.

And yet, that is part of the problem. My perception of God gets bound up in my experience of human limitations.

Thankfully, God's vision is so much more than we could ever conceive. It is not down to us to build the Church for it is God's church not ours.

And God's church, the body of Christ, is not dependent on **our** ability to work together to build something of bricks and mortar,

or **our** ability to hold together human relationships,

or even **our** ability to share the faith we have found with others.

It is dependent upon **our faith** to recognise who Jesus is, to confess like Peter, that Jesus is Lord, the Messiah.

In today's Gospel, Jesus and the disciples have travelled from Galilee, to the region of Caesarea Philippi, a centre of Pagan worship. By this point, the disciples have spent much time with Jesus, gaining a picture of the man they are following, their leader, their teacher, their friend.

They have witnessed amazing acts – miracles.

They have seen his compassion and they have seen him withdraw to a quiet place to pray to his Father.

As they have been able to receive it, his identity has been revealed to them.

And so we reach this turning point.

Peter is put on the spot. Jesus asks him, 'Who do you say I am?' He responds, declaring his faith in Jesus as Lord and Messiah. God incarnate.

Peter's faith will continue to be tested as he follows Jesus on the road to Calvary that lies ahead but he now believes, deep within, who Jesus is.

Jesus is the Son of Man as Matthew terms him, the anointed one, the Christ.

Peter knows this.

Peter knows this, not through his own endeavour but, through God's grace, this has been revealed to him. In our lives, wherever we are, we are drawn together because this is being revealed to us too.

In the midst of the storms and in the times of abundance in **our** lives, when we are sharing what we have found with others, when we rest in the silence of our hearts, we know that Jesus is the one in whom we put our trust. And, as we have heard in previous weeks, God can take the little we have to offer and multiply it into something far more than we can imagine.

You are Peter, and on this rock, **I** will build **my** church.

Rowan Williams writes, 'The church **is** because God **is** and **acts**, not because of what we do or think.'<sup>1</sup> This is such a source of encouragement!

It doesn't negate our responsibility towards being part of God's mission but it does remind us of a bigger picture. The Church is given to us as the means of our participation in an eternal reality.

This is important in two ways. One, because we can see so clearly the ways in which we fall short and we know we must do better.

We are not as welcoming, as loving or as inclusive as we should be. We do not always honour one another and reflect the Kingdom. We know that we have not got the balance of representation right and we have driven people away. We do think of ourselves as better than we ought. It is in thinking deeply about walls of division that we have been challenged to pray and reflect on how we can be open to changing our attitudes through attentive listening.

It is also important because the challenges and opportunities created for the Church as a result of Covid 19 have led us to a transitional point. Will we take the opportunity to discern afresh what sort of Church we are called to be?

**We** are the Peters of the Church today.

We are the rocks on which he, Jesus, Messiah, Son of the Living God, is building **his** church, the new community which he brought into being by his death and resurrection and the sending of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>1</sup> The quote is taken from Rowan Williams, 'Mission and the Life of Prayer' in Susan Lucas, (ed.) *God's Church in the World* (2020)

So what of us?

How can we deepen our relationship with Jesus and through him, come to discern God's will for our lives and his Church?

Well, I think this takes us back to the power of prayer and the sound of silence.

Now, I don't want us all to be singing Simon and Garfunkel again for another week, good as they are, but when Geoff spoke two weeks ago, he talked of engaging with silence as a means of participating with the Holy Spirit to enable the yeast of the Kingdom bubbling within us to take effect.

Silence.

Silence can be beautiful but it can be hard.

For in it we have to still ourselves and rest in the presence of our Lord.

We have to listen for his voice when so often we want to do all the talking.

In the silence we might catch our own glimpse of what the Kingdom is like.

In the silence we might feel his presence and come to believe, deep within us, who Jesus is.

God, through Jesus, meets us in the silence.

And as we trust him and he guides us, so he builds his church.

Let us pray,

Lord, help us embrace silence and be people of prayer who,

however tentatively or boldly,

confess our faith in Jesus as Lord and Messiah.

**Amen**