

The angel who talked with me came again, and wakened me, as one is wakened from sleep. ² He said to me, 'What do you see?' And I said, 'I see a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it; there are seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it. ³ And by it there are two olive trees, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left.' ⁴ I said to the angel who talked with me, 'What are these, my lord?' ⁵ Then the angel who talked with me answered me, 'Do you not know what these are?' I said, 'No, my lord.' ⁶ He said to me, 'This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord of hosts.

⁷ What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain; and he shall bring out the top stone amid shouts of "Grace, grace to it!"

⁸ Moreover, the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ⁹ 'The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also complete it. Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you. ¹⁰ For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel.

'These seven are the eyes of the Lord, which range through the whole earth.' ¹¹ Then I said to him, 'What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?' ¹² And a second time I said to him, 'What are these two branches of the olive trees, which pour out the oil through the two golden pipes?' ¹³ He said to me, 'Do you not know what these are?' I said, 'No, my lord.' ¹⁴ Then he said, 'These are the two anointed ones who stand by the Lord of the whole earth.'

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¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' ¹⁴ And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' ¹⁵ He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, ^[c] the Son of the living God.' ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ 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.'

Prayer: "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer."

Many Churches celebrate the Patronal Festival of Saints Peter and Paul along with our parish; either today or tomorrow. Today is the nearest Sunday to the 29th June which is the 'more correct day' to remember those two great men. Our Church like many others is dedicated to Peter and Paul; the Apostles who over the centuries have been, and continue

to be an inspiration to the people of the world and to us all in Olney. These two great men of God are remembered on the same day in the Church calendar for a good reason. In short, the motivation of remembering two men of vastly different backgrounds and upbringings on the same day is to highlight that the love of God is for everyone.

Peter (formerly Simon) was a Galilean fisherman with a deep understanding of the seasons, sea and the weather – his livelihood after all depended upon it. He understood the natural signs of the weather and those within the waters indicating where fish might be found, he was used to hard physical work that demanded every ounce of his strength and courage and he had no education in the formal sense as far as we know. His education from when he was a small boy would have revolved around fishing, watching and listening to older family members and neighbours also engaged in fishing, learning to read the signs in the skies, the weather, the seas, learning to maintain the tools of his trade – mending nets and repairing boats. Peter was an ordinary working man, but he was also the one that God chose to understand and then declare of Jesus, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’ Peter was the one blessed by God to speak out the truth of Jesus’ identity and later on to be the first leader of the evolving Christian Church.

Paul (previously Saul) was born at Tarsus (in what is now Turkey) to Jewish parents. He was a Jew but he was also a citizen of Rome. He had a good education and later in life studied under the celebrated Rabbi Gamaliel at Jerusalem. He developed an in-depth knowledge of the Jewish Law. Knowing the law intimately; he became a strict Pharisee, a man who lived according to each and every known rule. As a young man he was incensed by Jesus of Nazareth and His claims, he was present and consented to the stoning of Stephen, and he then went on to actively participate in the persecution of the early Christians.

Peter and Paul were two very different men, yet both made their mark on the early Church and have left their mark on us today with their legacy of passionate, active faith.

Peter was called by Jesus to follow Him and he walked the highways and byways with Jesus. Paul by contrast was your classic 'poacher turned gamekeeper'; he was zealous in his persecution of the early Christians known as followers of 'The Way'. (Luke tells us that Paul initially breathed 'threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord'). But then after an encounter with the risen Lord Jesus on the Road to Damascus where he heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?.....I am Jesus whom you are persecuting". After that meeting with Jesus when Paul was blinded he went on to neither eat nor drink for three days. After those three days the veil was lifted from Saul's eyes, and he saw physically and spiritually as if for the first time. He then knew that Jesus was God, and from that moment Paul began proclaiming the Good News, first in the synagogues at Damascus and later on in Jerusalem. With time Paul's mission to the Gentile world would become clear to him; a mission that would take the Good News far beyond Jerusalem and out into the reaches of the Roman Empire. Through his preaching, teaching, building Christian communities and writing innumerable letters Jews became Christians and so did non-Jews. Paul's understanding of the Jewish Scriptures, the nature of God and what it means to live the Christian life impacted the lives of many in the first century and have continued to inform and instruct Christians on their journeys down through the ages – both individual's lives and the lives of Christian communities. In Paul's writings we encounter some of the most profound Christian teaching available to us. Paul understands and consistently proclaims that God in Christ loves each and every one of us, deeply, endlessly, freely. And as followers of Christ, we are in our turn, called to reflect His love as best we can, (however imperfectly) in every aspect of our lives.

Peter was so different; he knew that God loved him. He knew that he wanted to be with Jesus from the very first moment that he met Him. We can probably safely say that Peter's faith in Jesus was an emotional response born from the heart. He felt Jesus' love, experienced His love when he travelled with Him, listened to Jesus teach, saw Him heal, watched Him perform miracles and saw Jesus' love and compassion for others. Peter also experienced Jesus' love and forgiveness after having let Jesus down on the night of the

crucifixion as later Jesus reinstated him and commissioned him to care for His Church. Peter was not calculating but impetuous and often misunderstood. But his heart was in the right place; he meant well.

Paul was more intellectual. After his conversion he could see Jesus in the Old Testament (the Jewish Scriptures). He hadn't seen the miracles that Jesus did (like Peter had) but rather he experienced his own miracle of having his eyes opened by His Saviour.

Peter and Paul had their own, often strong disagreements around the crucial issue of whether or not Christians had to be circumcised and they had a blazing row over the issue of foods and the Jewish laws. Yet it was these two different and deeply flawed individuals, Peter and Paul that God chose to be the first leader of His Church in Jerusalem and the first great missionary to the Roman Empire; to teach about Jesus in the place of the heart of the Jewish faith and to take the Good News out to the Gentile world.

So, what might God's message to us all be through the lives and the inheritance that we have from Saints Peter and Paul?

Well definitely that we don't all have to come from the same backgrounds, upbringings, social standings or have the same colour of skin to be loved by God and to serve Him.

God loves all and God's love is for all.

We may be someone who has a more emotional experience of God like Peter did, or we may have a more intellectual understanding of God like Paul did. The encouragement for us all is that we are all meant to be and are created to be different. We may just know God is real and feel it deep within our bones, or we may have thought it all through and read just about everything there is to read on the subject. There is no one route to faith in Christ. All are invited, all are welcome, and all are loved. A person may have grown up in a Christian home and always known that Jesus was with them, or they may have had a dramatic conversion experience, or their way to faith may have been anything between the two. God

welcomes all from every background. 'Always believers' and 'converted believers' there is no distinction in God's eyes. The Patronal Festival of Saints Peter and Paul is our reminder that God loves women, men, young, old, non-Jew, Jew, uneducated, educated, people of every colour and nation.

Coronavirus is the invisible enemy that shows no respect of individuals, who they are and where they come from.

Jesus Christ is the invisible friend who shows respect to all, whoever they, wherever they come from and wherever they have been.

Why are Saints Peter and Paul remembered on the same day?

To send out the clear message: Whoever you are, whatever your backgrounds, whatever your upbringing; Jesus loves you.