

# The Radiance of the Apostles

Date: June 29, 2025

Location: Apostles Anglican Church

## Readings

Ezekiel 34:11–16

Psalm 87

II Timothy 4:1–8

John 21:15–19

## Opening

'All things are twofold.' Such was the summary our church fathers gave regarding reality and all things the Lord created. In the Lord's wisdom he made all things good and beautiful by making them in *pairs*. He made day and night, the heavens and the earth, land and seas, and finally male and female. God created things differently, yet he created things to *relateto* one another in *harmony*. Why does every fifth note on a piano *fittogether*, middle C naturally harmonizing with G, D with A, E with B, and so on? Why does it sound like a single tone, pleasing to the ear, even though it's two notes, not one? Because when God creates things twofold, he does so to make music throughout his creation.

What in the world does this have to do with the two apostles we celebrate today, Sts. Peter and Paul? God did not cease making things twofold when the days of creation were complete in Genesis. As we've read recently from Galatians in the Daily Office, when St. Paul met St. Peter, they discerned that God called St. Paul to be an apostle to the Gentiles and St. Peter to be apostle to covenant Israel. This is how God worked to bring forth the wonders of his new creation, to preach the Gospel first in Jerusalem and Judea, then Samaria and to the ends of the earth. The Gospel was proclaimed to all nations so that every tribe, tongue, and nation would profess that 'Jesus is Lord' to the glory of God the Father.

## Feasts of the Apostles

In past years, we haven't had a Sunday observance of the Feast of St. Peter and Paul, though we have celebrated this day at our Wednesday service many times. But the Book of Common Prayer encourages us to celebrate the feasts of the apostles when they fall on a Sunday. And this year, the Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul occurs on a Sunday.

This date always comes near Pentecost for two reasons:

1. We're meant to see that these two apostles, different though they be, are called, anointed, and sent by the same Holy Spirit.
2. Tradition holds this date, June 29, to be the martyrdom of St. Peter and St. Paul.

Many other apostles have a feast day all to themselves. Consider other major apostles. We celebrate St. James on July 25th, St. Andrew, Peter's brother, on November 30, and St. John on December 27th.

This is no slight to Peter and Paul. There is a message here in the celebration of St. Peter and St. Paul *together*. All things are twofold, God made difference to produce harmony, to make music in his Church, for his Church to make creation into a cosmic liturgy.

When I began planning worship for this summer and saw that this feast day occurred on a Sunday, I knew I wanted us to celebrate this feast rather than observe the sixth Sunday of Pentecost. By the wisdom and grace of God, the Holy Spirit named this parish Apostles Anglican Church. We esteem the tradition of the apostles not solely because we are Anglicans who care about tradition. For us, this is personal. When God named this parish Apostles, he gave us a vocation, an identity, to be a parish in a particular way. Ours is a lifelong meditation on apostles so we always grow in understanding who *we* are called to be.

With the two foremost apostles before us today, I want to meditate further on this mystery of difference and unity and what it means for us. But not only this theme from St. Peter and St. Paul. To be an apostle means to suffer nobly for the Lord Jesus Christ, and to receive glory through suffering. We will look at St. Peter and St. Paul as examples for us in the way of sacrifice and suffering. First let's consider the two vocations of Peter and Paul, where they differ and where they unite.

## *Twofold Vocations, for the glory of God*

### *Peter*

We'll begin with Peter because he was called and commissioned before Paul came to confess Christ as Lord. There's so many avenues into Peter's life we could take, his call, his temperament, his confession of Jesus as Christ, his failure and betrayal. We simply don't have time to look closely at those biographical moments. Instead, let's find the essence of Peter's vocation as an apostle in his final encounter with Jesus before the Lord's ascension. Three moments from that final encounter in John 21 summarize Peter's apostolic calling:

1. Jesus' command to feed my lambs
2. The call of obedience and suffering
3. Renouncing an unholy curiosity about others

A few comments on these three aspects of Peter's life. When we think about an apostle, we think of mission, sending, going forth, and so on. But Jesus establishes the basis of an apostle's life and ministry in three words he speaks to Peter three times: 'Feed my sheep.'

There are several layers to this exchange. One is that this threefold commission restores Peter from his threefold betrayal on Maundy Thursday. Another is that the echo of Ezekiel's prophecy in this exchange. Our Lord revealed himself as the Good Shepherd who took care of his sheep throughout his ministry. He is the Lord who sought the lost, brought back the strayed, bind the injured, strengthened the weak, and feed his people with justice. Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Ezekiel that God himself would become the Good Shepherd of his people. But fulfilling that prophecy himself was not the final goal. The goal was to form a global church filled with apostles whose heart was feeding and tending the sheep of Christ. It started with Peter, the chief of the apostles, commissioned to proclaim the Gospel, especially to God's covenant people, Israel.



In the same moment he's commissioned with this pastoral, caring work, the Lord calls Peter to obedience in his suffering.

*When you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.<sup>1</sup>*

Jesus was always forming his disciples, not only for the three years they followed him around Galilee, but even in Peter's commissioning. Prepare for the way of suffering, Peter. This is what it means to be an apostle. I know you don't want this, but being my apostle means renouncing your will. You must yield all things to my will, even when suffering comes.

And this brings us to the third aspect of Peter's calling. Peter has to renounce his will about other people, too. In this final encounter with Jesus, the Apostle John stands nearby, and Peter wants to know if John has the same difficult call he just received. Both of these apostles were in Jesus' inner circle. Both witnessed Jesus' glory on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Just like when he was on the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter wants to control things. But an apostle must release control. Even, or especially, the chief apostle, which Peter was. Peter looks at John, and says to Jesus: 'What about this mean?' And the Lord rebukes Peter saying, 'If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!'<sup>2</sup>

Peter, you don't comprehend how the different callings of all my apostles fit together in wholeness. Cease inquiring into the will of God for others and focus on learning obedience yourself. Peter must learn that John's path and his destiny will be different, yet the Lord desires that they become one. Not the same, but one.

## Paul

When we come to the Apostle Paul, Paul's apostolic call isn't easily summarized either. What a remarkable life he lived. We can't explore the many interesting avenues to Paul's life this morning, either. Instead, we'll briefly focus on some of the final words he composed to his spiritual son, Timothy.

At the end of his life, Paul summarizes the work of an apostle and an evangelist to Timothy. It's a mini-biography of Paul's vocation: preach the word, be ready at all times, correct and rebuke false doctrine with patience and teaching, endure suffering.

Of particular interest today is that Paul even had to rebuke Peter for hypocrisy when they met one another in Antioch! Peter, the chief of the apostles, had to be corrected by Paul for not living in the truth of the Gospel. This was not a *clash* of the apostles, but a reproving word that restored the harmony, the oneness, among the Church.

Back to Paul. Paul's devotion to proclaim the Gospel carried him throughout the Mediterranean, preaching especially in cities and planting churches. Yet Paul's life was one of enduring tremendous conflict for the purity and truth of the Gospel. At his heart, he was not only an apostle but, a pastor, a shepherd who not only defended his people from error and false teaching, but provided for their

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<sup>1</sup> *John 21.18*

<sup>2</sup> John 21.22

material and spiritual needs. Paul described himself both as a father who would exhort and encourage his children, and as a mother who would act with gentleness taking care of her children.

On so many occasions in his life as a preacher, apostle, and pastor, Paul endured rejection. It was a prophecy that the Lord spoke about Paul while he was still struck blind from the Damascus Road. Before the scales fell from Paul's eyes, Jesus told Ananias, 'Paul is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.'<sup>3</sup>

## Martrydom

Though they differed in their backgrounds—Peter, an uneducated fisherman; Paul, the most educated and committed of Pharisees; in personality and temperament; in their missional calling; Peter sent to covenant Israel, Paul to the nations; the Lord worked with these different gifts and callings to build up One Church, One Kingdom.

And what united Peter and Paul in this one kingdom was faithfulness in suffering, even when it meant martyrdom. Christian tradition tells us that St. Peter was crucified upside down and St. Paul was beheaded, both in Rome under the reign of the Emperor Nero.

We could speak at length about St. Peter and St. Paul's remarkable stories, their spiritual gifts, their writings, but all of these virtues would have been forfeited had they not endured suffering to the end for the love of Christ and his Church.

*I am already being poured out as a drink offering...I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.*<sup>4</sup>

This is where apostles find common ground across all different temperaments, gifts, experiences, and backgrounds: **apostles are those endure suffering to the end, who believe the Lord's glory comes through suffering, not despite it.**

When St. John Chrysostom reflected on the holiness of St. Paul's life, he meditated on Paul's humility in suffering, saying:

*He sought dishonor more than we seek honor, death more than we seek life, poverty more than we seek wealth, sorrows more than we seek joy, and he prayed for his enemies more than others pray against their enemies.*<sup>5</sup>

We celebrate the feast of apostles and saints for their **examples**. Not only their teaching, instruction, and gifts, but their examples.

Let the petition from today's collect become a collect of the heart:

*Grant that your Church, instructed by the apostles' teaching and example, and knit together in unity by your Spirit, may ever stand firm upon the one foundation, which is Jesus Christ our Lord.*

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<sup>3</sup> Acts 9.15-16

<sup>4</sup> 2 Timothy 4.6-8

<sup>5</sup> *These Truths We Hold: The Holy Orthodox Church, Her Life and Teachings*, page 205.

## Closing – The Glory and Radiance of the Apostles

As we close, I want you to direct your eyes to the icons of our holy apostles behind me. Icons of saints are not seeking to reproduce the historical features of the subject's countenance. I doubt St. Peter's beard was this well groomed, though St. Paul's baldness is scripturally accurate.

Instead of aiming for pictorial accuracy, the icon of a saint directs your eyes to their face. The image of a saint in an icon presents to us the face of a saint glorified, when their suffering is ended and they receive the reward of their endurance from Christ. This is why their faces shine with gold leaf, why their faces are peaceful. These images show apostles radiant faces because now they are looking at Christ face to face. Whether Paul stared down a murderous mob in Thessalonica, Peter faced the blows of the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, now they behold Christ face to face on the other side of their suffering.

Yes, we see other symbols of their spiritual legacy in scripture and the icons: the scrolls representing their writings in the New Testament. *But their greatest glory is their **example**, their imitation of our Lord Jesus in his suffering.* Saints do not attain glory by knowledge, leadership skills, talents, or gifts. Apostles receive glory by learning obedience through suffering. Consider the words of St. Paul from 2 Corinthians 5:

*This light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.*

Only an apostle who has encountered the crucified and risen Lord Jesus could profess that. Only an apostle could live that truth in the book of his life.

Though we be wondrously different in personality, gifts, and callings according to the wonderful will of God, we find common ground as his apostles when we endure suffering for the Name of Christ. Apostles believe that glory doesn't come without suffering and sacrifice, but through it. This is the greatest message of our lives: our example, our faith and trust, that Christ will redeem all suffering and then we will be crowned with his glory. Apostles suffer a little while here below, and then we look at our crucified, risen, and ascended Lord, face to face, forever. That is where St. Peter and St. Paul are today. And that is where we all desire to be: in the glorious presence of God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.