

**ST PETER AND ST PAUL**  
**30<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2024**

To the glory of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Folk who know me well will tell you that the pictures on the front cover of the service booklet often serve as a visual aid for the homily, and this morning is no different. You may well wish to have them in front of you, as this may be the longest sermon I've ever preached - after all, it's been 40 years in the making, and you may need the visual distraction as I ramble on! I did consider exploring the significance of the number 40 - you know, Moses' 40 years in the wilderness, forty days and forty nights, forty days between Easter Day and Ascension, but then I thought we probably know that, so let's go somewhere else.

When my brothers and I were little boys, our Granny B used to do this nursery rhyme with us: 'Two little dicky birds, sitting on a wall. One named Peter, one named Paul. Fly away Peter, fly away

Paul. Come back, Peter, come back Paul.' Why on earth you would call the dicky birds Peter and Paul? It may well be that this little nursery rhyme is part of the collection of ditties and poems that the Post-Reformation Roman Catholics in England used, to teach the basics of the faith to their children, before the Roman Catholic Relief Act of 1829, when they were finally permitted to practise their denomination of Christianity openly. Certainly, it has always been the practice of the Roman church to celebrate Peter and Paul on the same Feast-Day, as we do here in the Anglican Church of Australia. That isn't the case in the Church of England, or at least, it wasn't when I was growing up and then preparing for ordination. Petertide in England was around the Feast Day of St Peter on the 29<sup>th</sup> June, and St Paul's Feast-Day was 25<sup>th</sup> January, the day when we celebrate his conversion. Petertide was also, conveniently, the end of the academic year, so, as soon as theological college was finished, we were ordained and off we went into ministry.

I wonder how many here this morning regularly go to the Diocesan ordinations every November, or have been to just one or more ordinations anywhere? How many of us would know what, at their ordination, deacons and priests are 'Charged' by the bishop to do?

This is where you might want to count the number of sheep on the front of the service booklet or explore the icon of the images of Peter and Paul! What follows is part of the Church of England ordination liturgy that was given in similar words when I was ordained. The bishop in part 'charges' the deacons that: "They are to work with their fellow members in searching out the poor and weak, the sick and lonely and those who are oppressed and powerless, reaching into the forgotten corners of the world, that the love of God may be made visible." And then the priests, as follows: "Priests are called to be servants and shepherds among the people to whom they are sent. With their Bishop and fellow

ministers, they are to proclaim the word of the Lord and to watch for the signs of God's new creation. They are to be messengers, watchmen and stewards of the Lord; they are to teach and to admonish, to feed and provide for his family, to search for his children in the wilderness of this world's temptations, and to guide them through its confusions, that they may be saved through Christ for ever. Formed by the word, they are to call their hearers to repentance and to declare in Christ's name the absolution and forgiveness of their sins.

With all God's people, they are to tell the story of God's love. They are to baptize new disciples in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and to walk with them in the way of Christ, nurturing them in the faith. They are to unfold the Scriptures, to preach the word in season and out of season, and to declare the mighty acts of God. They are to preside at the Lord's table and lead his people in worship, offering with them a spiritual sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. They are to bless

the people in God's name. They are to resist evil, support the weak, defend the poor, and intercede for all in need. They are to minister to the sick and prepare the dying for their death. Guided by the Spirit, they are to discern and foster the gifts of all God's people, that the whole Church may be built up in unity and faith."

And then the bishop addresses all the ordinands: "We trust that long ago you began to weigh and ponder all this, and that you are fully determined, by the grace of God, to devote yourself wholly to his service, so that as you daily follow the rule and teaching of our Lord and grow into his likeness, God may sanctify the lives of all with whom you have to do. In the name of our Lord we bid you remember the greatness of the trust that is now to be committed to your charge. Remember always with thanksgiving that the treasure now to be entrusted to you is Christ's own flock, bought by the shedding of his blood on the

cross. It is to him that you will render account for your stewardship of his people.

You cannot bear the weight of this calling in your own strength, but only by the grace and power of God. Pray therefore that your heart may daily be enlarged and your understanding of the Scriptures enlightened. Pray earnestly for the gift of the Holy Spirit." Is it any wonder that ordination services seem to go on and on for ever and ever?!

As I was pondering and reflecting in preparation for this homily, it occurred to me that the 'motto' that the Vestry here has adopted is a pretty good summation of all of this: 'Growing Faith, Building Community, Sharing Hope.' 'Growing Faith, Building Community, Sharing Hope.' And, sitting as it does as a heading at the top of this service booklet, and on our parish Pewsheets, that is pretty much a charge for all baptised Christians. And it's an enormous ask for all of us. But the Church recognises this when it gives the

bishop the words: “You cannot bear the weight of this calling in your own strength, but only by the grace and power of God.”

Back in my rugby-playing days we had a saying: “Play what’s in front of you”. It really didn’t matter too much what the coach had said pre-game, all we could do was play what was right in front of us, at that particular moment in time. And that is true of Christian discipleship as well - the background information and story is important, yes, but we have to be in the moment. And that has been underlined in the Gospel readings and sermons here at church in the last couple of weeks - we should always be mindful that Jesus is in the back of the boat, even if it feels that He might be asleep some of the time! We have to be present in the moment! The difference between the calling of priesthood and that of the laity, is that the priest is ‘set apart’ in order to have more time and regular opportunity; for the laity there is not that luxury of extra time so potentially there is less opportunity,

but, God will still sanctify the lives of all with whom we have to do, if we endeavour daily to follow the rule and teaching of our Lord, and thereby grow into his likeness.

Back to our nursery rhyme. Did you notice that both birds flew away from the wall, but also came back? We often stray from the wall that is discipleship, both unintentionally and deliberately; but God always welcomes us back ... and re-strengthens us for His service.

I end by sharing one or two sayings that have stuck with me and have been encouraging throughout my ministry so far.

Written in two separate ordination cards given to me back in the early 1980’s was:

“The one who calls is faithful”,

and “He must increase, I must decrease”.

And then, latterly, this by Thomas Merton has become very significant:

‘The Road Ahead’

My Lord God,

I have no idea where I am going.

I do not see the road ahead of me.

I cannot know for certain where it will end.

Nor do I really know myself,

and the fact that I think that I am following your will

does not mean that I am actually doing so.

But I believe that the desire to please you does, in fact, please you.

And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.

I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.

And I know that if I do this,

you will lead me by the right road

though I may know nothing about it.

Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem in the shadow of death.

I will not fear, for you are ever with me,

and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

Let us pray:

God, whose insistent call

disturbs our settled lives:

give us discernment to hear your word,

grace to relinquish our tasks,

and courage to follow empty-handed

wherever you may lead,

so that the voice of your gospel

may reach to the ends of the earth. **Amen.**

**Stay at lectern for post-homily silence!**

May your word live in us **And bear much fruit to your glory.**