

Feast of St Peter and St Paul
2026 (tr)

2 Timothy 4.6-8, 17,18
Matthew 16.13-19

The Company of the Broken

A Feast of Fractured Saints

I wonder what Peter and Paul would think about being paired-up on the same feast day.

Today, the Church celebrates two people who could not have been more different in temperament, background, or even theology - and yet, they became the twin pillars of the early Church. Peter, a blustering fisherman with a heart too big for his head; Paul, the intellectual zealot who persecuted the Church before becoming its greatest missionary. One denied his Lord, friend and brother in a moment of fear; the other hunted down Christ's followers acting as cloakroom attendant for the people who stoned Stephen to death. Both were broken men. And yet, it was in their **brokenness** that God met them... remade them... and sent them out as witnesses to the resurrection.

So, the story of Peter and Paul is definitely **not** a story of perfect people. It's more a story of human frailty being met head-on... gathered up into the grace of God. It's the story of the Church... its diversity, its struggles, its mission and its openness to the movement of the Holy Spirit.

And for the two saints we remember today, it's a story of **faith, failure and transformation**.

Faith: The Leap into the Unknown

Peter and Paul both knew what it was to stake all their chips on a single, risky claim: Jesus is Lord.

For Peter, it began as we've just heard, on a dusty road in Caesarea Philippi. Jesus asked the disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?' And then, the question that would define Peter's life: 'But who do you say I am?' Peter, ever the one to speak first and think later, blurts out: 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' (Matthew 16:16)

It's a moment of raw, unfiltered faith - the kind that doesn't wait for proof, doesn't demand explanations, just leaps. And Jesus' response? 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.' (Matthew 16:17) But Peter's faith was not yet mature. It was impulsive, emotional, and often wobbly. Just a few verses later, he would deny Jesus three times, his courage evaporating like mist in the morning sun. His faith was real - but it was not yet unshakeable.

For Paul, faith was a complete overturning of everything he thought he knew. He was a man who had built his identity on **certainty**: the certainty of his Jewish heritage, the certainty of

his moral superiority, the certainty that he was right and everyone else was wrong. And then, on the road to Damascus, Jesus shattered every illusion. The voice from heaven doesn't say, 'Well done, Saul. you're doing a grand job'. It says, 'Why are you persecuting me?' (Acts 9:4)

There's no gradual awakening of faith for Paul's. It's more a violent collision - a man literally knocked off his high horse, blinded by the light of grace, and left stumbling into a new life. His faith was not in his own righteousness, but in the righteousness of Christ, given to him as a gift.

All of which raises a couple of questions for us as we reflect on Peter and Paul:

Is our faith in Jesus, or in our ability to be 'good Christians'?

Do we trust in our own strength, or in the God who specializes in using broken people?

Failure: The Fertile Soil of Grace

Peter's story is, in many ways, a story of serial failure. He's such a reassuring presence for us because he can always be counted upon to make a mess of things. He was the kind to promise far more than he could deliver. "Even if all fall away, I never will," he boasted (Matthew 26:33). And then, within hours, he was swearing that he didn't even know Jesus. Peter's failure was not a one-time mistake. It was a pattern. He jumped into the water to walk to Jesus - and then started sinking (Matthew 14:28-31). He cut off a soldier's ear in a misguided act of loyalty - only to be soundly told off by Jesus (John 18:10-11). He sometimes struggled to be open about his loyalty, following Jesus at a distance, watching his trial from the shadows (Luke 22:54).

And despite all that, after the resurrection, something extraordinary happened. There's no rejection... not even any reference to the countless failures. Jesus could have said, 'Sorry Peter, you've messed up too many times. I'm going with someone else.' Instead, he met Peter on the beach, cooked him breakfast, and asked him the same question, three times: "Do you love me?" (John 21:15-19)

Peter's failure is not the end of his story. It's the beginning of his transformation.

Paul's story is different in tone but similar in substance. His failure didn't come from weakness, like Peter's - Paul's Achilles heel was pride. He persecuted the Church because he was sure he was right. And then, in a single moment, he realised he had been wrong all along. His failure was not in betrayal, but in zeal fuelled by pride rather than love.

Both men learned the same hard lesson: God's grace doesn't depend on our perfection. In fact, it seems to thrive in our brokenness.

So through faith and failure we come to **transformation**.

Transformation: The Alchemy of Grace

Peter, once the blustering fisherman, becomes the rock on which the Church is built.

He preached the first sermon at Pentecost, healed the sick, and faced imprisonment and execution with a courage that amazed his captors. His letters, in the New Testament, are filled with a humility and wisdom that can only come from someone who has known their own weakness - and yet been loved by God anyway.

Paul, once the persecutor, becomes the greatest missionary (advocate for the Gospel) the world has ever known. His letters have shaped the theology of the Church for two thousand years. He wrote from prison, from shipwreck, amid beatings and betrayals, and yet his words are filled with joy, hope, and an unshakable trust in God's faithfulness.

Peter and Paul are transformed by God's grace working with their faith and failure. It's not an instant transformation. It's a process - for each a lifetime of learning to trust God in the midst of their own frailty. Peter stumbled again and again. Paul wrestled with his "thorn in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7). But in their brokenness, God's power was made perfect.

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And that's the radical truth of the Gospel: God is not waiting for us to be perfect. God doesn't need us to have it all together. In fact, God seems to prefer broken people.

- Moses has a stutter, but God calls him to lead a nation.
- David is an adulterer and a murderer, and yet God calls him "a man after my own heart."
- Peter denies Jesus, but Jesus asks him to be "the rock" upon which the Church, the Body of Christ is built
- Paul persecutes the Church, but Jesus meets him on the road and turns his life upside down.

It's a truth worth sharing with those within and beyond the walls of Christian communities that The Church is not a gathering of the righteous. It's a messy but beautiful collective of the redeemed - people of faith and failure who have been broken open by grace and remade, transformed into witnesses to God's love.

So let's perhaps ponder this week where, if we're honest, are the brokennesses in our lives? What are the failures and weaknesses that make us the clay jars that Paul speaks of in 2 Cor 4. And are we willing to stumble, to fall and to be picked up again by the grace of God? And mindful of our human frailty, let's try to remember that there is treasure in those clay jars. Just as it did with Peter and Paul, if we let God in... allow our faith and failure to be touched by God grace, through an unknowable transformative power, the light of the gospel will shine out of our lives.

Amen.

Questions for personal reflection / prayer:

- Are you willing to stumble, to fall and to be picked up again / restored by the grace of God?

- Are you open to being surprised by the Holy Spirit?

- Are we a church where all are welcome; where the broken are healed; where the Gospel is proclaimed not just in work, but also in deed?