

The Day of Peter and Paul, Apostles, 2008  
Good Hope Lutheran Church

Grace, mercy and peace be multiplied among you, in the knowledge of God, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, AMEN.

Today we are invited to reflect upon two of the most important personalities, in the entire NT. These two men were dominant figures in the early church, and their influence is still clearly felt today—I mean, after all, there’s hardly a week goes without at least *one of them* being mentioned in our Bible lessons. Today you see we are invited to look at both Peter and Paul, together, and I hope you get the irony in this. Because Peter and Paul, probably didn’t like each other that much.

We’re talking oil and water here, two men with completely different backgrounds and completely different personalities. Two men who each saw himself as one specially chosen by the Lord for leadership in the church. These two men, I suspect they managed to “make nice” the few times they actually met face to face; but they battled by proxy all throughout the NT, and down through the ages as well—it is worth noting that in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Luther loved to quote St. Paul while his Catholic opponents frequently referred to the authority of St. Peter. So today, I want to make sure you know the truth about Peter and Paul, and their differences, so that you may then come to understand a greater truth—namely, what kept them together. They may not have liked each other, but they could still love each other. They may have been rivals somehow, but they shared a common goal, and a common mission. They were both sinners—that’s a problem for all of us, they were sinners too and so could be rude and a lot of other things besides. But they both trusted their lives to the one who died and rose again, they knew themselves to be loved and redeemed and forgiven by none other than Jesus Christ, and when you know that because of Christ you’ll have a place someday in heaven. Well, you can get over a few things on earth.

So, Peter and Paul, and their very human differences. Peter was an illiterate fisherman, while Paul was extremely well-educated, a college professor. Peter was a leader among those who had actually known Jesus. Paul was a Johnny-come-lately, a convert ready to tell life-long believers

what they were doing wrong. Peter saw the Church's mission as first and foremost to the Jews. Paul preached to the Jews, for a while, then went gung-ho for the rest of us, the Gentiles. In places like Corinth, where a congregation was having a big ol' fight, some people said "We believe what brother Peter taught," while others said "We follow brother Paul." In other words, intentionally or not, these two guys found themselves leading rival factions in the church. When they actually met in Acts 15, it was tense. It was worse in Galatians 2, when they argued bitterly. Peter and Paul had their differences, and it could have been very bad.

It wasn't, because they also had faith. Their relationship with Christ was the great equalizer. Could Peter be proud, knowing he had denied Jesus three times at the crucifixion? Could Paul boast, knowing he had murdered Christians before his own conversion? Each could only trust that this Jesus who died and rose again had a place in his heart for him, and room in His kingdom too, each man could only live by faith and maybe, maybe could begin to learn to love; the way God in Christ loves us all.

Think about that—they could only live by faith, and maybe begin to learn to love the way God loves us all—think about that; as we turn from Peter and Paul and their relationship, to our own relationships today.

Marriage, for instance, and family. Tell me. Do you always actually like the people you happen to be related to? Do you? Teenagers look at parents, parents look at teenagers, you wonder, what, was there a mistake made at the hospital? Is this person actually related to me? Husbands and wives—wedding cakes are sprouting everywhere in the church lately, and newlyweds always just so much in love—good grief. Will the feeling last? About a week and a half—then you're in the same boat as the rest of us. Do we always like the people we're related to?—probably not. So what keeps us together? What makes a family? Love, which is more than what you feel. Love, which is deeper than human differences and disagreements. Love, which is founded in God and made possible by God, love which is made real is Jesus Christ. How could Peter hold a grudge against Paul, when Peter knew full well he was himself a sinner, one who had denied Christ three

times? How can I hold a grudge against my wife, when I know I also am a sinner, one who denies Christ daily. How could Paul resent Peter, when Paul knew that all Peter wanted for the Gospel to spread and grow? How can I resent my wife, when I know she wants what I want—the health and well-being of our family. How can you, resent each other. Humbled by sin, lifted by Christ we know—what we have in common, is more important than what would drive us apart.

Our community as a whole, and our world. People don't always like each other, people often find reasons to argue and fight. But as the people of God through Jesus Christ, we can see through the differences to the common denominators. The most obstinate rascal at a public meeting still has the good of the community at heart. Enemies of this nation love their children too—and we are all loved and forgiven by God. Humbled by sin yet lifted by Christ, we are free to learn to love even the people out there we have a hard time liking—*especially* the people out there we have a hard time liking—free to love the way Christ has loved us.

And this is true, in a special way, within the church, and among churches. What we have in common is more important than anything that could drive us apart, because what we have in common is Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior. Taken together, Peter and Paul can be seen as patron saints of the ecumenical movement—Lutherans Methodists Baptists Catholics, we none of us have a lock on the Lord. If we can't put human differences aside for the sake of the one who died and rose again, then heaven help us—and heaven help this world. Humbled by sin, lifted by Christ, is there any reason really why churches can't just get along?

Meantime, Peter and Paul, apostles. Were they always best buddies?—no. Did they always even like each other?—maybe not. Did they love each other in Christ, were they united by the one Gospel of salvation?—yes, as are we all, unto life everlasting.

In the name of Jesus Christ, AMEN.