

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Feast Day of St. Peter and St. Paul Observed - Year A

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Acts 12:1-11

Psalm 87:1-3, 5-7

II Timothy 4:6-8, 17-18

John 21:15-19

06/29/2023

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. John:

15When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." 16A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." 17He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. 18Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." 19(He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."

The Gospel of Our Lord

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

St. Paul

Good morning! Dr. Mark Allan Powell, a seminary professor, begins his chapter on Paul in his introduction to the New Testament with the following: *“Religion professors sometimes like to stump their students with a trick question: Who was the founder of Christianity? The students, of course, say, ‘Jesus,’ and the professors respond, ‘No. It was Paul.’ The point is that Jesus was a Jewish peasant who said and did some remarkable things in Galilee, but by the end of his career there was nothing on earth even remotely resembling a world religion. It was Paul who took the message of Jesus—and about Jesus—to the world. By the end of Paul’s career the people who believed in Jesus were organized into churches, communities of faith that had confessions and liturgies and bishops and deacons. And these churches were scattered throughout the Roman Empire. Almost anywhere one went there were Christians—adherents of a new religion. ‘Paul did this,’ the religion professors will say. ‘Not Jesus.’”*¹

And today we celebrate that very man. Paul, along with St. Peter, form the two missionary efforts to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ to all the world. Peter was tasked with sharing that story with the Jews, while Paul was sent to the Gentiles, a word that means anyone who wasn’t Jewish. Paul got the short end of the stick if you ask me, because the amount of non-Jewish people FAR outweighed the number of Jews that lived in the world at the time!

¹ Powell, Mark Allan. *Introducing the New Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015. p. 247.

Between the two I always had more in common with St. Peter. Brash, loud, outspoken, and often the first to jump without thinking of the consequence, Peter and I got along. St. Paul, on the other hand, was thoughtful, intelligent, and patient. Not things that usually rise up to the top for me. But it is St. Paul that gave this congregation its name, and I've grown from being intimidated by the Saint to being thankful for his great gifts to the church. Book after book and article after article on Paul all begin with similar words to what Mark Allen Powell wrote: behind Jesus, no single person has contributed more to the growth of our faith.

So let's examine this man who wrote half of the New Testament letters. It seems that St. Paul was born in Tarsus, a city in the south of modern day Turkey. While Paul was a Jew, he was born with full Roman citizenship, something that gave him certain protections and rights during his travels. He would have been fluent in Greek too, the trade language of the time, and both of these things would have helped him to travel in Gentile circles. At some point he traveled to Jerusalem and was taught by a famous rabbi of the time before he became a passionate critic of the Christian Jewish believers.

Which brings me to a bone of contention. One will often hear that Paul changed his name from Saul to Paul, but this isn't true. Saul would have been the name that he used while traveling with other Jewish people, and Paul would have been the name he used in Gentile and other Greek speaking circles. So when Paul makes the switch to the name that we all know, he's making a commitment with his very name. He was called to the Gentiles of the world, and he would go by his "Gentile" name from then on. This was a way of signaling, maybe even to himself, that his mission had changed.

Paul was committed to forming intentional communities wherever he went. He would travel as a tentmaker, move to a new town and set up shop while he worked two jobs, mending and making tents and spreading the good news. And while we refer to his travels as “missionary journeys,” it would be more accurate to say that it was one long trip for Paul. In one city he stayed two years! After a community was strong enough to handle things on their own, he would move on to the next city, but through his letters he stayed in contact with those other communities, and it was from those letters that we find some of the most insightful theological work ever written. Names like St. Augustine, Martin Luther, and John Wesley all credit the writings of St. Paul as central to their understanding of the faith.

I think St. Paul has a lot to show us, especially here at St. Paul’s. Here was a man who was familiar with the joy that could be found in long term friendships, friendships like the ones we celebrate with our musical and choir director Dale and his wife Sonja (and their dog Jazzy!) as they move on to something new. But Paul also shows us the excitement of new possibilities and new friendships as we start something new with Gail! Paul also shows us the importance of sharing and teaching our faith, something we did for the last six months with Vicar Lucas.

Paul shows us the value in listening to where God is calling too, here was a thoroughly Jewish man who had no intention of welcoming this new Christ community, and yet he listened to God when called to change. And that might be the hardest most impressive thing of all! In a time when the future of the church seems so uncertain, Paul is a lovely reminder that God has been working with “new” for thousands of years, and nothing can stop God from the work that we have been blessed to be a part of. And so, today

we give thanks for the work of St. Paul, may we never forget the many lessons his work can teach us. Amen.