



Induction of the Rev. Christopher Pappas at Christ Church Cathedral June 28, 2020: The Feast of Saints Peter and Paul

John 21: 5-19

When 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.”¹⁶ A 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.”¹⁷ He 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.”¹⁸ Very 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.”

Peter: Hot-headed, impulsive, mercurial: one of those act-first-and-think-later sorts of people. And Paul: Arrogant, self-righteous, contentious: a man who loved the sound of his own voice. This is one way of describing Peter and Paul—the two people that our calendar invites us to celebrate today on the day we’re formalizing the partnership between the Rev Chris Pappas and Christ Church Cathedral. Peter, the unlettered Jewish fisherman and Paul, the erudite, Pharisaical thinker; Peter, the one who denied Christ and Paul, the one who persecuted Christians.

And so what do we make of these two? How are we to think about them, to receive them as our own on this day and to allow them to give us the good things that they have to give us? How do we allow their stories to inform the story of Christ Church Cathedral and its new rector?

For some, I know, this might be a bit of stretch for all kinds of reasons. To state the obvious, Peter and Paul were both men with certain assumptions and privileges in their culture that doesn’t match the experience of some here today. Peter and Paul lived in the 1st century with its own challenges and issues and we live in 2020, a year that is perhaps like no other. Finally, Peter and Paul had powerful personal encounters with or dramatic visions of Jesus, and few of us have had such experiences.

And yet as Christians here on the coast of Canada in an unprecedented time, with a mind numbing uncertainty before us, I have to believe that Peter and Paul are still valuable forebears in the faith in the same way that Mary, the pregnant teenager who had the courage to say yes, the woman who some say was the first of Jesus's disciples, is a valuable forebear for us in the faith.

Thinking about this way, then, became a bit of a door for me. What I regard as the Church's two important summer festivals: the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul and the Feast of St. Mary the Virgin—put us in touch with a strange and unlikely trinity of forebears in the faith. So different from one another and so different from us, they must have some commonality that transcends their differences with one another and has the power to leap across the years into our Christian lives today and into this very pivotal moment for Chris and Christ Church Cathedral. But what is that commonality and what is its relevance to us?

Akoloutho. This I believe is something they share, something they bring to us. It's the Greek word that occurs at the very end of our gospel for today depicting a post-resurrection dialogue between Peter and Jesus. "Do you love me?" Jesus asks Peter three times. Peter says yes each time and is told each time to care for those who will be entrusted to his care. Jesus then makes another comment and then concludes the entire exchange with "*Akolougei moi.*" "Follow me."

Akoloutho— to follow. It's the same word that Jesus uses with Peter the first time he meets him, when he calls Peter away and from his nets and into a life of fishing for people. Follow me. This sense of following is, of course, not just about coming over here from being over there. Rather, it means to accompany on a path in the sense of becoming a learner, to throw your lot in with a teacher, to in a sense become a kind of intern along a way. In this passage, then, Peter is renewing his commitment to an internship with Jesus—becoming a learner once again in Jesus' way of walking with God and in his way of walking with others. *Akoloutho.* Follow me, Jesus says to Peter: accompany me along the way as a learner, as an intern, as a practitioner.

Many of us know about internships. We enter them when we are not very qualified, when we do not think we have the skills to do what will be asked of us, when we are not exactly ready, when we do not have all our rough edges sanded away, when we don't even know what we don't know.

Akoloutho. All we have to do is to be willing to follow.

This then, is what the three: our Peter, Paul and Mary, have in common as our parents in the faith. Bringing whoever they were, coming from wherever they might have been, each in his or her own way, they said "yes" to becoming an intern along Jesus' way.

For Peter, of course, Scripture suggests that the invitation to follow was a direct one. And then it is an invitation made a second time. For Paul, the invitation to follow came like an interrupting flash of light calling all that he was doing into question. For Mary, the invitation to follow began with her saying "yes" to a mysterious and fearful angel. But that invitation must have grown over time as it dawned on her what kind of internship she had actually said "yes" to.

And this, I believe, is what we're looking at today as Chris and Christ Church Cathedral come together with all of us, of course, playing our supportive part.

Sure, Chris has lots of experience and has accomplished many, many things before he ever got here. Sure, this Cathedral under Peter Elliott's leadership, has accomplished many, many things and has

had a ball doing it. But, my friends that was then, and this is now. You are being invited today to sign on to a new internship together of following Jesus. In this internship neither Chris nor this Cathedral will be throwing out everything that came before. But, hear this, following Jesus is not about simply continuing what was done before. Following Jesus is always, God help us, a new adventure in which we must sort out the specific new ways we will express the self-giving love, the thirst for justice, the commitment to the dignity of every human being, the willingness to lose life in order to gain life and the unquenchable hope that Jesus, himself, is all about. For all these things need to be grounded in the actual context today—the place, the times, the circumstances, the issues, the joys, the fears, the craziness, and the actual people who are already here and the actual people who might come into our orbit.

And, you know what, as I think about what might happen here in the Chris Pappas—Christ Church Cathedral internship with Jesus, I believe that, just like before you're going to have a ball together.

And so thank you, Peter, Paul and Mary, for the witness of your different internships with Jesus. Thank you for your willingness to follow him, though you were not ready, though it disrupted your lives and though it cost you dearly.

May the red we wear today be a sign of all that this internship, this following of Jesus, will mean here at Christ Church Cathedral in a season of a pandemic and in a time that thirsts for racial justice.

Let red remind us of the colour of blood poured out both at birth and in sacrifice. Let red remind us of the colour of wine that makes our hearts glad. And let red remind us of a love for other human beings and for the earth and its creatures that is as fierce as fire.

It is a love that will take us into places we had not counted on. It is a love that will cause us to celebrate, to sing and to suffer. It is the love that makes all things new.