

## **THE FEAST OF SAINTS PETER AND PAUL June 29, 2014**

### **Theme: Titans of Faith**

Copyright ©2014 Rev. Larry W. Dorsch, St. Paul Church, 140 Walnut Street, Weirton, WV, 26062. All Right Reserved. May not be reprinted without written permission.

The two titans of our faith we remember today are a study in contrasts.

Though both were born Jews and both died as Christian martyrs in Rome at the hand of the crazy Roman Emperor Nero in about 67 or 68 C.E., their similarities to each other probably end there.

Peter was most likely an uneducated fisherman of hoopie Galilee, married, with a family.

Paul was from a sophisticated Roman town, educated under a famous Jewish Rabbi in the capital of Jerusalem, and unmarried.

Peter knew Jesus of Nazareth well, having been called personally along with his brother Andrew and having spent considerable time with him as he conducted his ministry.

Peter had endured the whole passion, crucifixion and resurrection experience first-hand – boy, had he ever: just ask him about the night Jesus was arrested and what he, Peter, had done and said in the courtyard.

Paul, on the other hand, never met Jesus of Nazareth; he only met Jesus the Christ, risen from the dead, and him when he appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus to ask why he was persecuting him.

According to the Acts of the Apostles, Peter was the ultimate insider.

He was the leader who rallied the Jerusalem community after Pentecost to hit the streets with the Gospel message; he led the way

in welcoming non-Jews into the community; he was the voice defending the fledgling church before the authorities.

On the contrary, Paul was the outsider, on the mission band, going from town to town proclaiming the message, starting new communities, deputizing new leaders and moving on to the next town.

No moss grew under his feet.

If Peter and some of the others in the Jerusalem church were fretting whether new Christians should keep the Jewish Kosher diet, be circumcised and follow the other laws of Moses, Paul was off in Turkey and Greece baptizing new pagans faster than you could say “trash the matzo ball soup.”

When Peter and Paul finally met up at the Church in Antioch, Syria, they had a knock down drag out fight about the issue wherein the latter (Paul) called the former (Peter) a liar to his face.

You can read all about this little dust up in Paul’s Letter to the Galatians.

In the end, Paul won the day and Gentile Christians did not have to follow the Law of Moses: aren’t we ham and shrimp-loving Gentile Christians glad of that outcome!

How ironic is it that the very person who started out persecuting the Christian community because he thought it was going to destroy his beloved Jewish faith, himself became the very proponent of welcoming Gentiles into the Church without following the Jewish Law.

Finally, Paul antagonized enough of the Jewish leadership he got himself arrested and sent to Rome for trial before the Roman Emperor.

How Peter ended up in the Capital we have no record.

When Nero needed scapegoats for burning down a huge chunk of the city to build a new palace, he blamed the tiny Christian community

and Peter met his death on a cross, but upside down – a position reserved for especially difficult victims.

Paul was simply beheaded.

So why have I shared all this with you?

Partly because I think it is important to know and remember where we have come from.

Peter and Paul – men of wildly differing gifts and contributions to the early -- have been and are remembered as joint founders of our community of faith.

A second reason can be found in what each one said in the scriptures today:

Peter: **“Now I know for certain that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod...”**

Paul: **“The Lord will rescue me from every evil threat and will bring me safe to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory forever and ever. Amen.”**

Each one recognized that the power of Christ had rescued him from harm and danger, and had sustained him in his life and work on behalf of the Gospel.

His own ingenuity and cleverness had not done it.

Nor had his own brilliant planning and strategizing.

The Lord had rescued him – note that both men used exactly the same word: rescue.

If these two titans of the Christian faith have a message for us, clearly it must be to look at them and at our history as a community of faith.

Time and again, the Lord has rescued us, from ourselves and from enemies who would destroy the church of God.

And yet, the **“gates of hell have not prevailed against us.”**

Whether individually in our own lives as Christian believers or as a community of the Church, we have survived, we have been rescued, we have made it.

Christ will be there for us, as he was for Peter and Paul, as he has been through the nearly two thousand years since Peter was nailed to his cross or Paul had his head chopped off.

As Paul the master of words, wrote so powerfully: **“The Lord will rescue me from every evil threat and will bring me safe to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory forever and ever. Amen.”**

Saints Peter and Paul: pray for us!