

Sermon Notes: Jun 28, 2020 Focus: Peter and Paul

[Lectionary Readings](#)

Monday (June 29) is officially St. Peter and Paul’s day, but we offer it today. These guys are the first Christian “frenemies” and are icons of how the church has always been. Paul was a sandpaper zealot, and Peter was a good ol’ boy. Groups of people have gathered for millennia trying to find peace and encounter with God and Jesus. They are often surprised that they have waded through a bunch of irritating, opinionated humans just like themselves to get there. In my sermon, I will share with you one of my first encounters with salvation and Christians. I had to step around those people to find life in God through the church. Halfway through the sermon I will talk about multiple ways Hebrew scripture envisions the slippery word “salvation.”

**Salvation has multiple meanings in scripture**

**1<sup>st</sup> meaning** הַצִּלָּה (hats-tsa-la ’).



Esther 4 :14 *deliverance* will come from another place.

A modern ambulance company actually goes by this name. We the people can bring salvation. Don’t get me wrong, I don’t think we are the Savior, but we have a role to play in salvation, especially when we have the key to turn on the ignition.



**2<sup>nd</sup> meaning** לְגַאֲלָה (Ge oo la)

2 Samuel 7 --Israel who you *redeemed* from Egypt?

This has a strong nationalist sensibility. This is not nativism, but a belief that God actually cares about the place you call home. God works through the ways culture and land shape us as faithful people.

**3<sup>rd</sup> meaning** יֵשׁוּעָה. (Jeshua)

Exodus 15:2 The LORD has become *my salvation*.

This is the one most Americans would intuitively understand.

“Jesus Saves.” Early Christian believed that Jesus of Nazareth was Jeshua, Joshua, the Messiah. But they did layer that understanding on top of, and not to the exclusion of, the other meanings.



**I think we all can be “ambulance drivers” because redemption is worked out in the Arena of life.** It isn’t, nor has it ever been, easy. On April 23, 1910, Theodore Roosevelt

gave a speech called “Citizenship in a Republic.” He railed against the *cynical habit of thought and speech, a readiness to criticize work which the critic himself never tries to perform, an intellectual aloofness which will not accept contact with life's realities*. He was beset by critics who thought he was a wild man. They clucked in cynicism at his efforts. The most quotable part of the speech was a call to better the world:

“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.

Roosevelt was bold, a little irritating, and certainly arrogant, but he did not turn away just because it was hard. He was a deeply imperfect dude who had a mean streak (he had a little bit of Paul in him). For example, “William Howard Taft has brains less than a guinea pig.” Personally, I will take a hot-headed imperfect person any day over the genteel cynicism that so often infects faith communities.

**My First Vestry meeting**— The first regular vestry meeting I remember was a St. David’s in Austin. I was a second-year seminarian. As of today, I have been in or led over 200 vestry meetings. However, I remember what was going through my head that day in Austin. It was, “What the h..l was I thinking? I don’t want this. I want to lead worship. I do **not** want stare at an excel sheet for an hour and then spend another hour on an air conditioner compressor diagram.”

I left shaking my head and crawled out of that 3 ½ hour meeting. I was hopeful that maybe the meeting was an aberration. I fled to the warm blankets of books and theology back at ETSS (its name at the time). Here’s the thing, I am learning that my salvation is found in part through vestry! I have learned to give thanks when full and when empty, give thanks after boring meetings and exalted prayer; to be grateful during jubilation and heartbreak. Following Jesus is better than what the 11 year old (me) ever thought faith life looked like – you have to wait for the story in my sermon.

## **Back to our stars today**

**Paul (the purist)** Paul kept the faith pure by murdering Christians. He thought he was a really good guy. It never entered his mind that he might be a Marvel comics villain. These first Christians were “bad” because they were followers of “The Jesus Way”. It is only through Jesus’ intervention in blinding Paul on the road that Paul even begins to understand that terrorizing these people was not the right thing to do. He never quite got rid of that zeal and he struggled to actually love people his whole life. It was the way he worked out his salvation.

**Peter (the Bro)** Peter got to love Jesus after the resurrection in person. He was a genuine people person. When I think of Peter, I think of my stepfather who sold mobile homes. He and Peter are exactly alike... if Peter liked to butter his steaks and read horoscopes. Peter was a people pleaser and really had had a rough patch denying Jesus during the betrayal. Jesus comes back in person to invite Peter back (at the end of the Gospel of John.) Jesus keeps asking Peter to love him by feeding the sheep. There was no salvation outside the sheep for Peter.

**Salvation** We need salvation to make our lives function better than we can currently imagine. To me, this is the truth of grace which saves. This grace redeems the warped intentions of religious lunatics like Paul and strengthens happy-go-lucky people like Peter. Grace carries an 11 year old past the threshold of loony Christianity into grace-ful Christianity. Grace is about seeing more deeply, more clearly, and loving more fully. There is no peace outside the church. There is no holiness outside the arena. You will catch an elbow once and awhile but keep pushing your way into the community. It’s worth the dust, sweat, and blood. **Todd**