

Pastor Troy E. Medlin  
Feast of Saints Peter and Paul  
Grace, River Forest  
6/29/2025

*In Your Own Voice*

A former bishop and vice president of the Lutheran World Federation I know of, would often take time out of his week to visit and pray in the wooden pews of Old Muskego Church. A log cabin originally built in Racine County, Wisconsin. The first church built by Norwegian Immigrants in America. For him, it was a way of connecting with ancestors in the faith. Praying surrounded by walls that tell a story of faithful witness to the gospel in a particular time. The good news, which is always spoken in our own language whatever that might be. From far away places to these walls. What do they communicate? What is the story that they tell?

An Episcopal Priest writes about a pastor who begins each liturgy with the question, ‘who do you bring with you to church today?’ To whom are you particularly grateful or indebted? Whose blessing, guidance, challenge, or love accompanies you today. Some name a beloved family member who has died: “My grandmother who read me bedtime Bible stories when I was a little boy.” “My husband of 32 years; he had the most gorgeous singing voice.”

Others name writers, activists, or theologians who have inspired them recently: Toni Morrison. Howard Thurman. Mary Oliver. Julian of Norwich. Desmond Tutu. Others, biblical characters: Mary Magdalene. Daniel in exile. Hagar, who named God. The point of the question is to challenge the extreme individualism that often infiltrates American religion. The harmful and deceptive idea that each of us is a spiritual Lone Ranger, showing up in church on our own strength and by our own initiative, to do Christianity by ourselves.”

God is the one who always addresses you with promise from outside of yourself. God has always spoken through other people. Their words become God’s very word to us. We know what it sounds like. Life. Freedom. Joy. Recognition. We receive the good news primarily as it is proclaimed to us from the lives and witness of others. The word is connected to bodies and lived experience. We are bearing witness to that simply by our own presence in this gathering today.

Today we celebrate the faithful witness of particular people; two apostles, Peter and Paul. Together they testify to the good news of Jesus Christ that reaches across borders and boundaries of ethnicity, politics, geography, and all the ways that we would define and divide ourselves.

Last Tuesday, the church celebrated the feast of John the Baptist. The one who always points to Jesus.

Isn't that what Peter and Paul each did so well? Look- Jesus.

In Acts we hear of Peter. Bound in chains, in a prison cell, guarded not by one but two guards. There an angel taps him on the shoulder and leads him out into the world with the words "follow me." An iron gate opens and he walks on ahead. Rescued and sent.

This is our story. Each of us, in our own particular way- curved in on ourselves. In bondage to sin and unable to free ourselves. Trapped in the prison cell of sin and death. Chains that keep you stuck. They come in many forms. Shame, failure, comparison, the endless pursuit of self salvation in its myriad forms. Preserving the perception of control and success. It's exhausting there. In baptism- we each have been led out of that ever-shrinking place into the vast expanse of grace. Room to live again with our gaze turned outward, beyond our own narrow field of vision. Joined to Christ's own death and resurrection you have been set free. From the tomb of baptism-- that becomes a womb for us we hear his voice. Follow me. And we go. Not even fearing death any longer. The thousand little deaths that greet us daily or our final one. You belong to God- not any empire or tyrant large or small can lay claim on you. That's what Peter and Paul remind us.

Who else has spoken that message to you in as many words but a different voice?

We too, like Paul, have been rescued from the Lion's mouth. Death, even the small acts of letting go of ourselves and our own agendas, do not devour us, they become gates into life that we receive. Tomorrow. Possibility. Salvific spaciality. Relief. Lightness. The crown of righteousness- and all that God could ever give has been given to us as pure gift. Grace from start to finish and every stop in between. No earning or striving within these walls. Let go and live. It permeates Paul's letters.

Whose life and witness testifies to that for you and propels you forward? Who continues to speak the gospel to you in your own language? That your heart recognizes? Maybe they still walk among us or they join you at this table in the communion of saints. All the hosts of Heaven. For me- Michael Pellet, Jan Schnell, Sonny Kissel, Gordon Straw. Saints living and those who have gone ahead. The trail has been groomed, the path prepared. Now we speak the gospel in our own voice through vulnerability and risk, we proclaim-- our words become God's own in this time and place. Life, hope, love, welcome, justice.

Jesus speaks-- \_Sany\_\_\_\_\_ do you love me? I know that you love me. Feed my lambs.

\_Laney\_\_\_\_\_ do you love me? I know that you love me. Tend my sheep.

Grace, River Forest, do you love me? I know that you love me. Feed my sheep.

