

Sermon:  
St Paul's Day 24 June 2018

Ezekiel 34;11-16  
2 Tim 4;6-8, 17-18  
Jn 21;15-22

Today we celebrate St Paul's Day, honouring the Patron Saint of the Cathedral and celebrating the broader cathedral community, giving thanks for those who have nurtured us to this point and honouring those who are our future, looking to God our guide and strength.

Today we celebrate Saint Paul. A man who wrote or inspired about half of the new Testament- Of the 27 books in the New Testament, 13 are attributed to Paul, though 6 were probably written by his followers; and approximately half of The Acts of the Apostles, deals with Paul's life and works.. He was perhaps the greatest, or most influential man in Christianity after Jesus him self, the man who went from persecution to faith.

The seven undoubted letters of Paul constitute the best source of information on Paul's life and especially his thought; in chronological order (leaving aside Philemon, which cannot be dated) they are 1 Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, and Romans. Letters considered "Deutero-Pauline" (probably written by Paul's followers after his death) are Ephesians, Colossians, and 2 Thessalonians; 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus are "Trito-Pauline" (probably written by members of the Pauline school a generation after his death).. all in all a huge canon of words.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout my life I have been to many churches named after him, and worshipped at three, St Paul's Wahroonga in Sydney, St Paul's Manuka in Canberra, and now, Saint Paul's Cathedral in Sale. Paul has been up there on a pedestal if you like, his words, both stern and comforting ring through our theology.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Paul-the-Apostle>

Dr Kieren Williams who visited us earlier this year challenged some of what I know.. suggesting the letters were written by some, not one, among other things.

Paul may have been poorer than we imagine, he may have been a slave because of the stigmata,

The Church has glamourised him..

It would have been better if he'd been allowed to be himself, because it makes his vision of Christ more down to earth.. the scholarship reveals a more down to earth person trying to live out his faith like all of us.

What do you remember of St Paul from the scriptures? Perhaps his dramatic conversion? His words of encouragement and challenge? His teaching? His travels?

What inspires you? What does it mean to be a cathedral named after him?

To me Romans is the key, he almost gives a scientific view of the world, 'the whole creation groaning'. We are part of a whole universe that comes from God, through God, and to God, and is sustained by God. (Romans 11:36)

Paul is a profound thinker, very modern in many respects, and very revolutionary. He breaks down the walls of prejudice, and small-mindedness, opens us up to the possibility of change and helps us to adapt to a changing world, for example breaking down the barriers,

'There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:28 (NIV)

God is not partial to any one race. Pentecost shows us this is true, and St Paul captures this vision.

There is much to celebrate and much to inspire us today in Paul's writings.

What image of God do you receive from Paul?

Inclusive, free, healing restoring, accepting..challenging..

How do you see God? How do you name God?

Our readings give us a number of strong images of God:

From Ezekiel:

‘For thus says the Lord God: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. **12** As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep... **14** I will feed them with good pasture, ... **15** I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. **16** I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice.’ Ezekiel 34;11-16

God is a shepherd who will feed the fat with justice, now there’s a strong image.

And from Paul’s followers in the letter to Timothy, God is ‘, the righteous judge, .. the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. .. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom.’

2 Timothy 4

Theres another image

And from Jesus to Peter,

“Feed my lambs.” .., “.., do you love me?”...” “Tend my sheep.” ..., “, do you love me?”, “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... “Follow me.” John 21

A God of relationship, seeking out, restoring relationship and inviting us to follow..

The 23rd Psalm rings through all these readings..

What is your Experience of God?

What is your strongest image of God?

How do **you** see or imagine God?

I have met God in many places.

- feed my sheep - On retreat in the Adelaide Hills, I was lying on my bed, weeping, feeling sorry for myself when i heard God say, 'feed my sheep'. 'what me?' I said, 'I am not worthy'.

'Yes, you, get up, let go of self pity feed my sheep'. It took a bit of persuading, but who was I to argue with God? 'Feed my sheep' he said, 'Follow me'. I had a similar experience years earlier at Stroud at the Franciscan monastery there , when i was lying face down on the floor, again i heard God say, in my being, 'Get up!' Get on with it! Follow me'.

- ordination

On the eve of my ordination to the diaconate, Friday 22 December 1989 I wrote:

Lord,  
I come to you as a free person.  
I freely choose to give my life to you  
I know you have called me to this office  
But I have been free to accept or reject the offer  
Now I freely choose it and am grateful for the privilege.  
There have been times when I have been angry  
And fought against you, in fear.

Now, in awe and fear for your majesty, I come to you in  
love  
To give,  
to have and to hold,  
for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in  
health  
til in death we are fully united.

As a bride before the altar after many years of preparation  
of your patient waiting,  
I come...

The prayer concludes on a realistic yet humorous note:

It is the end and the beginning of a long hard struggle  
for now I am free

and I choose life, clerical collar and all.

- people at eucharist - I have met God Celebrating the eucharist, my heart was moved with love for the congregation as i looked at them.
- Homeless people st james, mary mags, st benedicts - I have met God in sharing a meal with homeless people in Adelaide, Sydney and Canberra, experiencing their generosity and wisdom.
- I have met God here, in you.

(As we will sing in our offertory hymn:

Now may we, like Paul, live boldly, go wherever God may send,  
witness in and out of season,  
run our race until the end.  
May we find our peace in Jesus, see our Saviour face to face.<sup>2</sup>)

Image - look, stare at the three dots in the centre for 30 seconds then close your eyes. what do you see?

Susanna

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<sup>2</sup> Words: Elizabeth J Smith © 1997 Smith, Elizabeth J. (Admin. by Elizabeth Joyce Smith) Used by permission CCLI Licence #140017 Music: "Cwm Rhondda" John Hughes (1873–1932

