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| Sermon |
| Year C, Trinity Sunday 15th June 2025 |
| **Sermon…. Peter the rock of God’s church**  Today we celebrate the feast of St Peter, and as we recall Christ’s commissioning of Peter, as the Rock upon which his Church will be built, it is also a time when the church traditionally ordains new deacons and priests into the church of God. Two new priests and one deacon was ordained in Newport Cathedral yesterday. And it is the first anniversary of my priesting today, and earlier in the week, on Tuesday, was the second anniversary of my deconning. Time really does fly, doesn’t it?!  So what is this church to which Christ called Peter and to which, God continues to call men and women today? Well let’s go back to our gospel reading and reflect on what’s said.  We join Jesus and some of the disciples as Jesus asks, ‘who the people say I am?’. It’s Peter who responds, as he recognises Jesus as being the Messiah, and it’s at THIS point Jesus says those fateful lines, ‘I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church’ (v18).  Now that’s not because Peter is the most clever or qualified, or because Peter is the most perfect. Indeed as the gospel unfolds, it becomes clear that for one called to the service of God, even to a ministry of leadership in the church; Christ knows that we will make mistakes.  But what’s important, is Peter’s heart; his capacity to be led by, to learn from, and be guided by God’s holy spirit. Jesus says, ‘For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father in heaven’ (V17). And of course at Pentecost it was this same Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, who would preach to the crowd and three thousand persons would be baptised into the church of God that day (Acts 2:41).  I think it’s important for us all to recognise that the church is full of human beings, fallible and imperfect, like Peter, like me and like all of you. But nevertheless when we are baptised, we are called by God into a community of people, a church, that is forgiven and made Holy in Christ, and even more than that equipped, by God himself, as we live out our lives and our calling here on earth.  Isn’t that AMAZING?!  The news of the church of God is amazing news, but if our own imperfection isn’t enough, we’ll see as we explore the remaining readings, to be the church is not always easy. Later in Acts we hear of how, following the spread of the gospel to both Jews and gentiles, Herod starts to persecute the church.  James is beheaded, Peter is arrested and finds himself in prison. Heavily guarded, with Herod intending on trying him, in public, after the Passover.  The growing Christian church is perceived as a threat, to both to the Romans and to the Jews. A reminder that, from the very beginning, extremist groups have been intent on irradicating the church, by force.  In Peter’s letter (1Peter) a significant proportion of it speaks of the persecution and suffering of the church. And Peter recognises it as being part and parcel, reflective even, of their calling to walk as they are to walk in the footsteps of Christ. As they are persecuted for being Jesus in the world and doing what Jesus did.  Now, whilst persecution in this country isn’t something that we much see, and where we do it’s rarely a risk to life, but there is certainly persecution of the church across the world. In fact Open Doors\* keeps a register of the 50 most dangerous places in the world, to live as a Christian. Places where, like the 1st century, there is real threat of being killed for being a Christian, places where children and adults are forbidden from worshiping, or sharing their faith in Christ. We are blessed to have religious freedom in this country.  But Peter reminds us that the church is called to respond with differently, even when the chips are down, even when we are persecuted. For Jesus when persecuted, did not return abuses with abuse, he did not threaten those who threatened him, but rather he entrusted himself wholly to God’s justice and mercy. And the way of the Church of Christ is to be likewise.  Indeed in Acts we see how, when Peter was arrested, the church, instead of storming the jail or reacting with hateful speech, prayed unremittingly; they got on their knees and turned to God for help, interceding relentlessly. For when the church prays, God hears, and things happen. And it is in upon THIS foundation of holiness that Christ built his church.  As a people, set aside to be Holy, just as Christ is Holy (1Peter 1:16), to be a Church of living stones, with Christ as our cornerstone (1Peter 2:6-7). The foundation on which the church is to grow; as people who know their need of God and who recognise the world in the context of both the physical and the spiritual in which God rules over all, in ways seen and unseen, in justice and mercy.  And so the church isn’t the establishment or the building or the vicar; it is a people, who make mistakes, who know we aren’t perfect, and who may be persecuted in the name of Christ. But who know too that we are forgiven, and so when we get knocked down, we dust ourselves off and we get back up again, standing firm in Christ. And we are a people who pray and are led by God’s Holy Spirit in all we do and say.  And so now as we reflect on the needs of our turbulent world, and for the persecuted church all over the world. Let’s spend a few moments now in prayer, committing ourselves and our brothers and sisters in Christ, wholly to God, and praying for God’s mercy, justice and peace.  **Notes:**  **\*The Persecuted church -** [Serving Persecuted Christians Worldwide Home - Open Doors UK & Ireland](https://www.opendoorsuk.org/)  This is often in places where, again like in our readings, the Christian Church is considered to be a threat against the existing prevailing religion, amongst extremists in Islam (e.g. in Iran) or Hinduism (e.g. in India); or because there is no religious freedom due to the perceived threat to the authorities, such as in the dictatorships of North Korea (No 1 on the Open Doors watch list since 2002) and China (where Christianity is considered a potential enemy, a threat to the ruling Chinese Communist Party. |