

Peter, the Jewish fisherman turned conservative elder statesman, and Paul, the Roman Pharisee turned liberal evangelist. Icons of Sts. Peter and Paul often show these two as the pillars of the church that they were. Icons like the one on the front of your bulletin capture the two men holding a small replica of a church between them. Others show the two of them standing side by side as though they just happened to wander into the same room while some icon writer made them stand there for a moment. A third version shows them standing cheek by jowl with their arms around each other as though they were just the very best of pals.

I've never really been drawn to those that simply show the two of them standing together on some flat background. I prefer those with the little church between them or those with their arms around each other because I think these capture some of what I imagine their relationship to have been like. If you look at the eyes of Peter and Paul on your bulletin, you can see a little tension there. (Are they pulling on that little church a bit?) Other icons look as though they have just begun a judo match.

And I think that tension is actually good for us to notice. Peter, the hot-headed fisherman who denied Christ, but then became the rock of the church. Paul, the persecutor of Christians who became a zealous servant of Christ. These two great apostles of our faith were at odds over just how far and in what form the Christian way should be fully open to Gentiles. Peter thought that Gentiles should observe Jewish practices as a condition of becoming Christian. Paul did not agree. He thought that the Good News of Jesus Christ had come to Jews and Gentiles alike, making them equal in the sight of God.

God called *both* men to nurture the budding Jesus movement that became the Christian Church, even in the passions of their differences. That's part of the reason that I am drawn to icons that show these two with a bit of unrest between them even as they hold the church between them. Different, passionately held perspectives will often lead to contradictions and inconsistencies. So the Church that arose from the witness and leadership of Peter and Paul is one in which orderly, beautiful worship interacts with our disorderly, disquieting lives. God fills our odd, mixed-up and gorgeous lives with grace to create sources of healing, love and inspiration.

Maybe I find Peter and Paul especially inspiring because I have been much like them, going out of my way to make God's straight paths into meandering tromps through the underbrush. Or maybe because I have seen, like Peter and Paul, second chances and third chances to start paying attention to God's still, silent voice urging: "Follow me." To have my own blindness cleared by God's light and to see God turn my disloyal acts into opportunities for renewed commitment, to consent to God's voice coaxing: "Follow me." To have God speak to the very depths of my own sin and self-destruction, not with condemnation, but with a gentle plea: "Follow me."

You see, being a Christian is less about who is right and who is wrong, and more about watching for and *following* God's pattern of bringing new things—new life—out of unexpected people and places.

Hanging beside the front door of our house, there is a terra cotta sun whose delightful face has an open-mouthed smile. A couple of years ago, a pair of Bewick's wrens started building a nest inside the sun, going through its mouth with bits of dry grass, moss and twigs. Now, wrens will build several nests during the spring, but they choose only one of them to lay their eggs in.

For weeks, we watched these tiny creatures come and go, but we tried not to get our hopes up. Too much traffic, after all, right there by the front door. Too dangerous, don't you know, and, well, just too *flawed*, especially given all the perfect places around the neighborhood.

One morning I went out to water the begonias in the flower bed just below our little wren's odd little nest. Turning on the hose must have startled them because from out of the mouth of that sun, from that most unlikely of places, tumbled five or six newly fledged baby wrens. They fluttered and flopped around the begonias for a second or two, and then found their bearings and flew off.

On this their feast day, my admiration for Saints Peter and Paul goes beyond the fact that they gave their lives for church of Christ, which, of course, they did. But I am more inspired by the way that these two very human people, with all their flaws and all their glory, helped God give rise to a Church. A Church that accompanies and supports you and me in our exquisitely strange realities; our chaotically organized existence; our broken and somehow marvelous lives. These are exactly the places where God is pleased to dwell, bringing God's own new things into being.