

Who are our heroes? ...

... who are our saints?

A talk given in the Joint Service in Beverley Minster on the Second Sunday after Trinity, 29th June 2025, by the Youth and Children's Minister, Ben Merrell.

Matthew 16:13-19; John 21:15-17; Acts 4:1-3, 8-10, 13

Today is a day that can be observed as a feast day of St Peter and so we've heard a selection of readings documenting his story arc in the Gospels and beyond: he's picked up by Jesus as a fisherman who's rather brash and in your face, working on the shores of Galilee; but after weeks, months, and years of hanging around with Jesus and his miracles and his teachings, our Peter begins to get it with who Jesus actually is! Now, we might remember on Maundy Thursday how Peter was huddled around the fire in the courtyard of the High Priest while Jesus is on trial in the house next to him - he does all he can to deny even knowing who Jesus is - which is why the interaction with Jesus on the shore of the Sea of Galilee (in John 21) is so vital to his redemption arc.

With the choristers this term we've been talking about Pentecost and thinking and reflecting on the boldness that comes to the disciples when they are visited by the Holy Spirit and Peter's boldness is certainly demonstrated in how he interacts with the Jewish Council in our third reading, the one from Acts - this is just one of many times in that book where we see this transformation of Peter, because he was changed when the Holy spirit came upon him. He'd always been impetuous and bold but before, he was focused on himself and concerned with his own safety - he followed Jesus to the trial, but he did not want to die there. But when the Holy spirit came, Peter became bolder, more able to understand God's plan, and he became far less concerned about his own safety as he was more concerned about spreading the gospel.

So, let's go back to our original question this morning, 'Who are our heroes?'

Now for me, as a sports fan [sorry, non-sports fans] this always goes back to big sports matches. So Mickey Van De Ven kicking the ball off the line in the Europa League Cup final - that was amazing; what a legend! [Sorry, Man United fans] or Ben Stokes at Headingley or Lord's six summers ago for England in the cricket; or more recently, it might have been Jonathan Rowe scoring the extra-time winner last night for England Under-21s - anyone watching that? A few of you; well done, that man. So these might be some heroes that you can relate to, people in sport battling against themselves and their bodies to do magnificent things on a sports pitch. Or it might be musicians and actors and artists working hard and excelling at their craft to create beautiful works of art on the stage or the canvas or the recording studio. Or it might be the more traditional super heroes, the Super/Spider/Batmans of the comic book world, or Super Tato, as my son came and reminded me because he's James's favourite superhero. Heroes, like these, who do incredible things, but they do it through their own force of will and their own hard work. So when we think in this context, our heroes are extraordinary people who triumph through their strength or their skill or their force of will, maybe - all good things to be commended and lifted up and celebrated.

But Saints - now, they're slightly different: Saints triumph not through their own strength and skill, but through God, through the Holy Spirit. Peter was a hero to his friends, a fisherman who

commanded respect. But with the addition of the Holy Spirit, he took those elements that were already there, and he became the rock that Jesus would build his church upon.

What does this mean for us this morning? Who are the saints in the world today, the ones in our lives? Are they restricted to Saint Teresa of Calcutta, for example? Or are there saints in our lives nearer than we think? As we look around this room today, in a space that is soaked with the prayers and praises of the saints over 800 plus years, who are those ordinary saints that we see around us today? Something that we've talked about in the chorister sessions over the last few weeks is the Holy Spirit descending on the disciples in that room in Jerusalem on Pentecost 2,000-ish years ago, how that isn't a one-time only thing. We are all Jesus's disciples and so when we ask, the Holy Spirit 'is' with us. The Spirit which brings strength and wisdom and boldness and clarity and courage or whatever it is that we need so that we can be elevated from hero to saint in whatever situations we find ourselves in - all of us!

And my message I want to send out loud and clear today is how blessed I felt watching some of the young people here at the Minster exploring and discovering that truth for themselves while they've helped to lead our community and congregations in worship.

We might not be the rock that Jesus built his church upon, or someone who goes and works in a slum somewhere thousands of miles away from Beverley, but we're all still able to be heroes to those around us and saints with the Holy Spirit working in us. So our little challenge for you to think about and reflect on this morning and this week, 'What ways are you called to be a saint?' Maybe it's something you're already doing - we heard in our little feedback there, lots of ordinary saints already in our community - but maybe there's something you feel called to doing but need to ask the Holy Spirit for that boldness to step out and follow where Jesus leads.

Reading Texts

Matthew 16:13-19

¹³ When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴ They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵ "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

John 21:15-17

¹⁵ When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶ Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." ¹⁷ The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."

Acts 4:1-3, 8-10, 13

¹ The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. ² They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. ³ They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day.

⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! ⁹ If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, ¹⁰ then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.

¹³ When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.