



**THE ANGLICAN ARCHBISHOP OF ADELAIDE
ST PETER'S DAY SERMON 2009**

JUST A FEW WORDS

For Simon Peter just a few words made all the difference.

Cock-sure, unsure Simon,
a muscular fisherman with a muscular tongue,
a man, who as George Bernard Shaw put it,
progressed in all things by resolutely making a fool of himself!

But for Peter, just a few words made all the difference.

And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people".
When they had brought their boats ashore, they left everything and followed him.

For Peter it happened in the frustrations of the workplace.
He had worked all night, all his life, it probably seemed,
and for nothing. But in this moment of confrontation with Jesus,
he knew he had found the answer to a thousand fruitless nights.
And so he left his nets and followed

What did the nets stand for? Employment?
Security? a way of life? Being in control of the future?

When we hear the call of Christ,
there are always nets to leave behind,
for, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it,
discipleship begins in an act which radically affects our whole existence.
And when confronted by this Christ who disconcertingly comes to us
at our nets, or at the fag end of one of life's long hard nights,
we might well echo Peter's protest of inadequacy,
"Lord depart from me, for I am a sinful man"

But the call of Christ comes nevertheless,
and in this Cathedral of St Peter,
may people continue to be disturbed by this Christ
who calls us from our entanglements to follow.

For Simon Peter just a few words made all the difference.

He blundered like a novice and queried like a schoolboy,
but when Jesus and his disciples came into the region of Caesarea Phillipi, and when Jesus
turned to them and said,

“Who do people say that I am?”

and when some said this and some said that,

it was Simon Peter who blurted out that famous confession:

“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”

From a moment of grace, from a spiritual encounter,

came that deep knowing;

from a surprising, almost shocked recognition of the presence of God

right there before him, the words sprang forth:

“You are the Christ”

But again, for Peter, just few words made all the difference.

Words of betrayal. Darkness and threat and terror, that night of arrest.

Fearfully he huddled and watched

as the interrogation of Jesus went on,

and in the flickering glow from the charcoal fire,

a servant girl recognised his features and made her claim:

“You too were with Jesus of Nazareth”

“I don’t know what you are talking about”

“I swear that I do not know this man”.

And again. And again.

Just few words made all the difference.

Words of faith. Words of betrayal.

Here in St Peter we find the Church.

Not the ideal Church.

This is the Church, we know as our own,

beyond sentimental idealisations,

beyond the nostalgia of idealised past,

here is the paradox of human frailty and divine vocation.

human weakness experiencing the holy:

Words of faith. Words of betrayal.

This is the realism of what we celebrate in this place today,

and perhaps the true glory.

Here is the journey of real people.

Yes, in this patronal festival,

we remember those who have laboured and built the life of this community,

but we know, too, that they are people like us.
We recognise that in this community of God's people,
the grace of God has been known,
yet known in fragile and flawed humanity
and in need of forgiveness.

As the people of this cathedral community of St Peter,
may we always remember,
that in the journey of faith,
it is never our brokenness that disqualifies us,
but our unwillingness to grow;
it is never where we've been,
but where we are prepared to go;
it is not the sinfulness of its people that makes the Church unfaithful,
but the self-assured comfort that prevents the journey of growth

For Simon Peter just a few words made all the difference.

In those days grief-grey after Easter,
it was easy to retreat back to familiar things,
the boat, the fishing, the lake.

But Jesus came again to Peter and with his threefold question,
and brought pain and healing:
Simon, Son of John, do you love me?
Simon Son of John , do you love me?
Simon Son of John , do you love me?

The threefold betrayal is not glossed over in that breakfast encounter.
God takes us too seriously for that.

It is faced with its pain. And so there is healing.
And Peter receives his call once more:

Feed my lambs.
Tend my sheep
Feed my sheep.

For Simon Peter just a few words made all the difference.

The famous Australian Church journalist, Francis James, once wrote:

"Often I am haunted by the memory of what I have been, and often tortured by the knowledge of what I am. Yet there is something that I would be, something far different...."

So it was with Peter.
For all that he had been and all that he was,
for all his failures his running away,
there was something still that he would be,
something far different.

*Feed my lambs.
Tend my sheep
Feed my sheep.*

In our Gospel reading today,
Peter's words of betrayal are met by words of belief.
Peter is released from his betrayal to hear Christ's words
of calling once again,
Peter is to become the something far different,
that was his destiny and call.

May this cathedral community of St Peter
always be a place
where people are set free by recognition and encouragement,
by words that bring the freedom to become,
no matter what the story, no matter what their name,
no matter what their shame!

As Peter responded to the Christ,
so he begins to know of that something far different that he was to become,
a foundation rock for the faith of others.

Through his ongoing experience of the restoring love of his Lord,
he grows to become what his early days might seem to deny,
through grace and suffering he becomes that Rock.

"Yet there is something that I would be, something far different....",
wrote Frances James.

Peter would have agreed.

But then, for Simon Peter just a few words made all the difference.

+Jeffrey Driver