

Reading: Matthew 16:13-20

Being agents of grace.

When I was little, my favourite programme on TV was Joe 90. Joe was a young boy who, even though he was just very ordinary, was in fact a MOST SECRET AGENT. At the beginning of the programme they would put him in a spinning thing which had a computer that made him able to take on the mind of another person. Their experiences and their knowledge became his experiences and his knowledge ... as long as he had his glasses on. Like the Thunderbirds, he was a puppet. Supermarionation they called it. He could only ever smile. Joe was part of the WIU or World Intelligence Unit. Anyway, I had lovely parents and mum wrote away to somewhere and back came a WIU badge and a little passport that said I was a most special agent. I couldn't have been happier. No longer was I just plain Nick, but I was a most secret agent with a WIU badge.

Today we have that well known reading of Peter and Jesus. We know it super well here at St Peter's because we read it each year at our patronal festival. To be sure there has been lots written (and I mean LOTS) about this passage and about Peter being the rock. But I think many writers miss the point.

Listen to how the Message version puts the closing of our reading. Verse 18 and 19: Jesus turns to Peter, "and now I'm going to tell you who you are, really are. You are Peter a rock. This is the rock on which I will put together my church, a church so expansive with energy that not even the gates of hell will be able to keep it out. And that's not all. You will have complete and free access to God's kingdom, keys to open any and every door: no more barriers between heaven and earth (for you)."

Peter is not a superhuman saint with amazing powers but Peter is an ordinary Joe. He represents you and me. Like us, Peter is slow to get the point, like us Peter is impulsive and like us Peter is flaky and unreliable. Remember how he denied Jesus three times. Peter is an 'every' person. And yet Jesus names him a rock and gives him a special task, one of expansive energy, and names him an agent of God's grace.

This is what you could call the Joe 90 syndrome. Jesus takes very human people, and transforms them into agents.

St Paul writing about this, puts it so well. "Who are we whom God has chosen, few of us are wise, few of us are powerful and yet to shame the wise God has chosen what the world counts as folly." In other words God has chosen you and me.

The good news is that in our very ordinary lives we can be agents of grace.

I heard of one such agent. He was a vicar and his church was on the Yugoslavia/Hungary border. It was during the time of the tragic war in Croatia. Because they were Christians, his congregation was in danger of being ethnically cleansed. Rather than let this happen, he made a sign for his car. It read, MORTICIAN. In multiple trips from Croatia to Hungary, he took his parishioners in body bags disguised as corpses, in the back of his van. In this way he smuggled them across the border and the local churches in Hungary took the people in and gave them a new home. Four hundred and ten people owe their lives to this bold pastor and his little van which literally carried them from death to life.

But you don't have to go to Croatia to find agents of God's grace.

Sarah is an uber driver. She has come to see her job as a Christian ministry. "I pray a little prayer to myself every time I pick up someone new. I pray that I can be the best uber driver for them. I get their bags for them. If they are old, I help them into the car. You would be amazed how much people share with me. Perhaps it's because they don't know me, but I have heard so much hurt. One time the passenger burst into tears. "This trip's on me," I said. She burst into tears again. Now she always asks for me and we have become close friends. On one level I'm just a driver, on another, I believe God has put me there for a reason. Uber driving brings me such joy when I can help others.

One Christmas a teacher was assigned to visit children in the hospital ward. A routine call was made requesting that she visit a particular boy's name and room number and was told by the teacher on the line, "We're studying nouns and adverbs in his class. I would be grateful if you could help him with his homework so he can keep up with the others." It wasn't until the visiting teacher got outside the room that she realized it was located in the hospital's burns unit. She wasn't prepared for the sight that met her, a young boy so horribly burned that he was completely unrecognisable.

She couldn't just turn and walk out, so she awkwardly began teaching him his nouns and adverbs. The next morning a nurse on the burns unit asked what did you do to that boy?" Before she could finish a profusion of apologies, the nurse interrupted her: "You don't understand. We've been very worried about him but ever since you were here yesterday his whole attitude has changed. He's fighting back, responding to treatment.... It's as though he's decided to live."

The boy later explained that he had completely given up hope until he saw that teacher. When she came, he arrived at a simple realization. With joyful tears he expressed it this way: "They wouldn't send a teacher to work on nouns and adverbs with a dying boy, would they?"

We have heard about Peter, a Croatian pastor, an uber driver and a teacher. Each of them had one thing in common: even though they are

very ordinary people, God lead them into a ministry and they became agents of grace. What about you? How is God leading you to become an agent of grace?