

Reading: Matthew 16:13-20

The man was getting a tour of the circus. What really fascinated him was the elephant. The elephant was fully grown, enormous in fact. But it stood around tethered by a small rope to a simple tent peg. The man looked at the elephant and he looked at the small tent peg. Surely that elephant could pull that tent peg out without any effort. So he asked his guide. "How is it that this enormous elephant is held back by such a thin rope and a tent peg? Surely if the elephant wanted to escape it could?" "Oh, that's easy to explain," said the guide. "When the elephant was young, it was held in place by a thin rope and tiny peg. It still works because elephants never forget."

Most of us have a childhood memory that holds us back from being set free. It might be a hurtful experience. It might be family expectations of us. It might be a nickname that we had. It might even be self-talk that we have been repeating since we were young. "I'm stupid or ugly or shy or ..."

Today we celebrate St Peter, our patron saint. Our church has been named after him since the church began here in 1858. And our reading has Jesus declaring that it is on the rock of Peter's faith that the church will be built. But a really interesting thing is happening. Jesus is giving Peter a new name. His old name was Simon. But Jesus is calling him Petros which means Rock. Rock for solid, reliable, always there. The trouble is that Peter was anything but. He was reluctant to follow Jesus' lead on many occasions, and when Jesus needed him most, at his trial, he denied him not once but three times. I think Jesus is doing something very clever with Simon. He is giving him a new name to bring out his best self. Jesus knows full well that Simon is flaky, but he can see something else in him as well, he can see a natural leader, a man of passion, a person who can be more than he has been. Simon is a simple fisherman. Jesus' new name for him is aspirational, it is designed to call forth a new person.

In the end, of course, that's exactly what happens. Peter goes on to give amazing leadership in the early church. The others gather round him and far from staying flaky he goes on to a crucifixion of his own. He asks to be crucified upside down because he says he is not worthy to die as his saviour, Jesus, did. That's why we have the symbol of the upside down cross.

Of course, the community wants to give the church names too. Declining is one, dying off another. These are names people give the church and sadly even some Christians have taken it on board. That's why we have in our mission action plan a focus on growth. To try and release the tether the community wants to put on us. To grow especially our family church, our digital presence, our care of the environment and our relationship with our 2pm congregation.

One day the community, and even some of us here, might find new descriptions of St Peter's - like Renewing, Healthy, Growing.

But what of us? I wonder what holds you back from being all that you can be. What is it that, like the circus elephant, has held you back from all that you can be in God? What do you tell yourself that stops you being all that God is calling you to be?

Spend some time this week in prayer, asking Jesus what he wants to call you going forward. Like Simon I'm sure Jesus has a new name for you, that will call forth your very best self.

We need to pray that God will release us from what holds us back as a church and as individuals.

On Fridays when we gather for prayer, we pray this prayer. Why not make it your own today?

*O Holy Spirit release me from the tension within me
with your holy relaxation.*

*Release from me the turbulence within me
with a scared calm.*

*Release me from the anxiety within me
with deep trust.*

*Release me from the fear within me
with strong faith.*

*Release me from the bitterness within me
with the power of your grace.*

*Release me from the darkness within me
with your great light.*

*Release me from the coldness within me
with your healing warmth.*