

St Peter 2015 (B)

Jesus said he would give St Peter the keys of the Kingdom of heaven.
St Peter is often depicted with a key or keys.

It is his symbol.

But what does it mean to have the keys of the Kingdom of heaven?

Have you ever lost your keys?

You know that panic-stricken, frantic search of the house, the handbag, the car, the shed, *everywhere*, to try and find them.

And the relief when you do!

Have we, I wonder, lost the keys of the Kingdom?

We don't perhaps use them all that much.

We know they are there on the hook when we want them,
but what about looking them out and seeking what they might unlock?
St Peter can help us as we take a look at his life.

First Peter, the fisherman, is called,
"Follow me and I will make you a fisher of men" (as the old version has it)

And he responds. He follows.

We tend to think of that story as being about a single cataclysmic moment of conversion.

And it is. Peter does indeed leave boat and business, family and community to go around with an itinerant rabbi for about 3 years.

But the more I follow the monastic journey, the more I realise that Jesus is *constantly* calling.

It isn't only just a once in the lifetime event.

Every day, Jesus invites us to stop what we were wanting to do and follow him.

In little things as well as big ones.

I was going to mow the lawn then sit down with a cup of tea but I notice the elderly neighbour's grass needs cutting too.

What is Jesus calling me to?

My favourite soap is on the telly? There is an omnibus at the weekend, so I could use the time now to pray?

What is Jesus calling me to?

Every day there are countless choices over so many, even small aspects of our lives and we can choose to follow Jesus or not.

One key to the Kingdom is to want to seek to follow Jesus, to let go of what we want and to do and be what he wants.

The key to the Kingdom is choosing to follow Jesus whenever he calls. Is it is key you have lost?

It will unlock things in you that you never knew were there, and we actually find that our true heart's desire, all along, was to follow Jesus, to choose *for* him.

The next key we might find is there in the famous incident where Peter tries to walk on water.

Seeing Jesus on the lake, Peter steps out of the boat too.

At first its OK.

But then he wavers and starts to sink.

Peter has to let Jesus catch him.

We do get it wrong. We do waver. We are not perfect.

But if we don't get out of the boat and risk failure

we will never learn that Jesus can and will catch us, hold us, save us comfort us.

Like Peter, we need to let Jesus catch us before we can ever be "fishers of men".

I might have chosen to stay in my parish.

I was very happy there.

I could have listened to all the voices that said "What the point of monastic life? You don't want to do that."

But I knew I had to step out in faith and at least see if the monastic life was my calling.

Another key to the Kingdom is to act out of our faith, actually to put our trust in the Lord,

trust that (even if it goes pear shaped, even when we have to admit we were wrong) Jesus will never let us go.

Your call may not be monastic life, but Jesus does call every single person

and you can sit comfortably in the boat, or you can take the risk and step out in faith.

Have you lost the key of stepping out in faith, staying in your comfort zone instead?

Then, a bit further on, we get today's Gospel story.

Peter is the one who identifies who Jesus is.

Jesus asks the disciples "Who do you say that I am?" and Peter announces, "You are the Messiah".

It is possible to see Jesus in so many ways.

Teacher, Prophet, King, Moral leader, healer and so on.

He is all these things.

But another key to the kingdom is to see Jesus as he really is.

Only some people saw the divine presence in Jesus when he was on earth.

To most he was a man – prophet, teacher *etc etc*, - perhaps a special man and talented man, a holy man, but just that, a man.

Only some, like Peter saw he was actually God, here on earth living and breathing and walking and speaking among us.

The penny dropped for Peter.

And still we so often miss him today.

We don't notice when God is at work.

We're not looking for it.

One of the ways we pray in the monastery is to take time at the end of each day to review the day's events in our prayers.

As we look back we can see little incidents of hope, or love, or learning, little glimpses of heaven, or growth and opportunity for change in ourselves.

We can also review the problems the difficulties and (where we can't, yet, see how God might possibly be at work in them) we can hold the situations before him, ask his help.

It may be something big, like a life-changing choice.

It may be the tiniest thing – like the fact that a raindrop on a plant leaf just caught the sun as we went past and for a second we appreciated the beauty of nature.

The more you do this review at the end of the day, the more you find you are seeing God in all things.

Discovering God at work everywhere.

And it need not take long. 10 minutes?

Is this a key you have lost?
Looking for Jesus at work in and around us?

It is quite a bunch of keys we're looking for now:
Responding to Jesus' call,
stepping out in trust,
and our continuous looking for him and to him.

It's not always easy.

Immediately after Peter had declared Jesus as the Messiah, he is trying to tell Jesus that of course he can't mean it when he (Jesus) tells his disciples that he is going to suffer and to die.

"Get behind me Satan" says Jesus in response.

We can feel chastised by God sometimes.

It can feel very unfair.

We want to justify ourselves

or to contradict what seems to be a painful path God is leading us on.

In the monastery, the Rule of St Benedict teaches us to live out of obedience and humility, as Christ did to his heavenly Father.

There are many times when we want to justify ourselves, to defend what we have said or done, even when we know its not defensible.

We just have to be right – even monks and nuns!

By learning to notice when we are acting out of motives like these, and instead trying to act and live from a place of obedience and humility,

we gradually learn .listen unquestioningly to Christ,

to be open to his ways,

and to put our trust in him even when the very opposite looks good to us.

So the key of obedience goes along with responding to Jesus' call, stepping out in trust and continually looking to him.

Is this a key you have lost?

Next on Peter's journey with Jesus, he and James and John are taken up the mountain where they see Jesus transfigured before their very eyes,

They behold his glory and have a vision of the great figures from the OT (Moses and Elijah) coming to speak with him.

The whole thing is mysteriously shrouded in mist, the disciples aren't quite sure if they are asleep or awake, dreaming, and a voice from heaven declares:

“This is my Son, the beloved, with him I am well pleased; listen to him”

So much is packed into that short sentence.

But looking at it, God is simply telling us about the keys of the Kingdom of heaven again, to:

Listen to Jesus Call. Respond to the call. Constantly look to Jesus. Obey Jesus.

It seems so simple!

But this holding of the keys of the kingdom of heaven takes practice. Daily practice.

Its no good leaving them on the hook in the hall.

We need to spend time pondering the scriptures,

inviting God to speak to us,

bringing to God our concerns,

leaving with God our anxieties and fears,

sitting in silence in the presence of the God who loves us beyond our imagining.

We need to use the keys to help Jesus unlock our hearts and open them as wide as the gates of heaven.

Even Peter failed.

Spectacularly he failed Jesus by sleeping at Gethsemane and then

denying his Lord 3 times on the night he was betrayed and captured.

There are days when we don't want to pray – we deny Jesus too, we are not there for him, either.

We hang up the keys and forget about them.

Yet, Peter was wonderfully reinstated by Jesus at the end of St John's Gospel.

Jesus never gives up on us, whatever we might do, or not do.

This is the ring the keys in Peter's bunch of keys of the Kingdom are hung upon.

It is centre...it is “key”!

We can only responding to Jesus' call to follow,
we can only step out in faith and trust,
we can only go on continually looking to him
and seeking to obey him in all humility,
if we first grasp that he will never let us go, never not be there.

The keys are there.

Find them.

Use them.

Unlock the Kingdom of heaven here on earth.

God knows, we need it!

Not just places in the news like Syria Tunisia, Ukraine
but W-S-M too.

You have the keys. They are always there for you.

Find them. Use them.

Ezekiel 3:22-27;

Then the hand of the LORD was upon me there; and he said to me, Rise up, go out into the valley, and there I will speak with you. So I rose up and went out into the valley; and the glory of the LORD stood there, like the glory that I had seen by the river Chebar; and I fell on my face. The spirit entered into me, and set me on my feet; and he spoke with me and said to me: Go, shut yourself inside your house. As for you, mortal, cords shall be placed on you, and you shall be bound with them, so that you cannot go out among the people; and I will make your tongue cling to the roof of your mouth, so that you shall be speechless and unable to reprove them; for they are a rebellious house. But when I speak with you, I will open your mouth, and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD’; let those who will hear, hear; and let those who refuse to hear, refuse; for they are a rebellious house.

Psalm 125;

Acts 12.1-11;

About that time King Herod laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church. He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword. After he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. (This was during the festival of Unleavened Bread.) When he had seized him, he put him in prison and handed him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending to bring him out to the people after the Passover. While Peter was kept in prison, the church prayed fervently to God for him.

The very night before Herod was going to bring him out, Peter, bound with two chains, was sleeping between two soldiers, while guards in front of the door were keeping watch over the prison. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He tapped Peter on the side and woke him, saying, ‘Get up quickly.’ And the chains fell off his wrists. The angel said to him, ‘Fasten your belt and put on your sandals.’ He did so. Then he said to him, ‘Wrap your cloak around you and follow me.’ Peter went out and followed him; he did not realize that what was happening with the angel’s help was real; he thought he was seeing a vision. After they had passed the first and the second guard, they came before the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them

of its own accord, and they went outside and walked along a lane, when suddenly the angel left him. Then Peter came to himself and said, 'Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hands of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.'

Matthew 16.13-19?

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.'