

One of the features of many a teenager's bedroom would be the variety of posters on the wall. Some, one suspects, are there to shock, put up to see our reactions; others may be of celebrities, people they admire, perhaps aspire to be like.

What I want to do this morning is to ask you to reflect on characters in the Bible you are attracted to, whom you particularly admire, who might be your "Biblical pin-up" and to offer some thoughts on my particular favourite. My father-in-law, a Presbyterian Minister, named his son Paul – the writings of the apostle were such an inspiration to him in his preaching.

My particular favourite crops up in our Gospel reading for today. This is the well known story of Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ. Having asked the disciples what people were saying about him, Jesus turns to them and says, "What about you – who do you say I am?" Peter, full of confidence, declares "You are the Christ, the son of the living God"

People who are so certain, so sure, can be a bit off putting at times. But that of course is not the whole story of Peter. He had those wonderful moments of insight; we see instances of remarkable courage as in the Garden of Gethsemane he attempts to fight off those who had come to arrest Jesus; as, when the rest had fled, he alone among the disciples follows the crowd right into the courtyard of the High Priest's house.

But then there is that other side to the story of Peter. As we read this morning, as soon as Peter had made that bold confession of faith, as Jesus starts to speak

of his coming suffering and death, Peter, appalled at what he is saying, jumps in to correct him, receiving that chilling rebuke, ‘Get behind me Satan.’ Then of course, having taken the risk of going right into the courtyard, when challenged by the young servant girl, ‘Are you not one of this man’s followers?’ he denied he ever knew him. One of the Gospel writers tells us that as the cock crew, the Lord turned and looked at Peter and Peter went out and wept bitter tears of remorse.

What I am saying here is that Peter knew his moments of insight, knew his moments of great courage but he also knew his moments of failure – this is what makes Peter so human, so real for me. We all know the reality of failure, what it is to fail ourselves, to fail other people, those we love, know what it is to fail in our service of God and his Church.

Where I draw strength and encouragement from the figure of Peter is the realisation that failure did not mark the end of his service of his Lord. My mind turns to the last of the resurrection appearance we have in John’s Gospel, the appearance of the Risen Jesus to his disciples at the lakeside. The disciples, we are told, had been out fishing all night to no effect. A figure on the shore tells them to put the nets in again and they take in a huge catch – the disciples, with Peter at the front, rush ashore to where Jesus has made preparations for a meal for them.

Then he takes Peter to one side. I can almost imagine Peter’s feeling of dread, as he lives once more his words of denial that he ever knew his Lord. There is instead that threefold question, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ ‘Yes

Lord, you know I love you.’ ‘Feed my sheep.’ Peter may have failed in the past but, because Peter knows his limitations, Jesus still loves him, still trusts him, still has a place for him in his purposes.

As I say, we all know what it is to fail. What we all need to know is that failure need not be the end. The story of Peter, in all his high and lows, is a wonderful illustration of the power of forgiveness, of reconciliation, to heal and restore in our relationships with God, in our relationships with one another.

What I also discover is that it is sometimes in our weakness and vulnerability that we are most potent in our service of God, most effective in our service of one another.

May God grant to each one of us something of the clarity of the vision of Peter, something of his courage in our times of adversity, something of his humility when we fail in our service of God and of one another, that we may go out to respond to the call of the risen Christ to feed his sheep.