

New Life Episcopal Church
Uniontown, Ohio



The Crucifixion of Saint Peter, 1601 by Caravaggio

A Sermon for the 5th Sunday after Pentecost
June 28, 2026

Rev Barbara Bond

Saint Peter and Saint Paul – The Episcopal Church

John 21: 15-19

Turning the world upside down

Today we commemorate saints Peter and Paul in the joint observance of their martyrdoms. Tradition tells us that they both died in the year 64 in the reign of the Roman emperor Nero, who seemed to enjoy killing Christians. Martyrdoms in the first centuries of the Christian movement were very inspirational to the new believers. Our Savior Christ was martyred, and we too are willing to die for our faith. The example of martyrdom is said to have been the seed of the new church.

Peter is the patron saint of one of our parishes that merged to form New Life. It is fitting that we celebrate him today. The artwork I chose for the cover of our bulletin is by the great artist Caravaggio, who frequently painted scenes of passion and violence. This painting, the Martyrdom of St Peter, follows the tradition that Peter requested that he be crucified head-down, as he did not feel worthy to die exactly the way Jesus had. This upside-down image could be a good metaphor for Christianity – how Jesus and his followers turned the world upside down.

I have been contemplating what the secular world tells us: Might makes right. Money is everything. Blessed are the rich, for theirs is the kingdom, all the kingdoms of the world.

Jesus offered a different world, upside down from the secular idols of greed, wealth and violence. The Beatitudes, which Jesus preached in the Sermon on the Mount, are a direct contradiction of the secular world's values, then and now.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven...

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth...

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled....

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God...

These values are in direct contradiction to how the Romans ruled. And they are also in direct contradiction to how our contemporary world is ruled.

Jesus took those sick secular values and turned them on their heads. Jesus gave us an upside-down world, where true value lies in peace, humility, love of neighbor, and caring for others.

Jesus came back after his resurrection to make sure that Peter got the point. Peter and other fishermen had resumed their former occupation of fishing when the Risen Christ gave them a seaside visit.

Jesus asks Peter three times to declare his love, which Peter does. And all of Jesus' responses are to “feed my sheep.” These are insistent and beautiful instructions for a

new life for the former fisherman, pastoral images about giving up his old life, to instead become a pastor of the Christian flock of the early church. Peter is invited to help turn the world upside down. He gladly took this role with humility.

Saint Peter died upside down. He had learned in his time with Jesus and his years of leadership of the early church to take the low road, if you will – not the highly visible road of grandeur, but the quiet and humble road preached by our Lord. Peter met his challenges with courage and purpose. I pray that we can learn from Peter and his reconsideration of life and love. We still have much to learn.