

Friends

In the 2016 religious thriller, Conclave by Robert Harris, Cardinal Thomas Lawrence is the one who has to start the proceedings to elect a new pope, and unexpectedly veers off script to say this:

*There is one sin which I have come to fear above all others: certainty. Certainty is the great enemy of unity. Certainty is the deadly enemy of tolerance. Even Christ was not certain at the end. “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” he cried out in his agony at the ninth hour on the cross. Our faith is a living thing precisely because it walks hand in hand with doubt. If there was only certainty and no doubt, there would be no mystery – and therefore no need for faith. Let us pray that God will grant us a Pope who doubts.”*

On Friday, I will be joining with our friends across the road at St. Edwards for prayers of thanksgiving for the life of Pope Francis, and for the work that is being done in Conclave even as I write, to choose the next Pope. It is not our way in Methodism to have a single person who leads, yet nevertheless, we can see that there is power in the office of the Pope, and indeed in the two archbishoprics of Canterbury and York, to be heard by a larger group of people than simply the Sunday morning congregation. May our prayers be with both denominations as they choose.

The Pope is seen as being in direct line with St. Peter, part of whose story we hear this Sunday. Despite knowing that he has let Jesus down when he denied him three times at the time of his arrest, Peter trusts Jesus to forgive him. Indeed, he may already have had the conversation as this is not the first time post-resurrection that they meet. Leaping into the water he swims to the shore and here we see the grace of Jesus in action. He gives Peter, three times, the opportunity to both declare his love for him and to receive his commission, the commission to feed and care for the sheep. As we come to church this week, do we come seeking forgiveness, or asking God what he would have us do next for him? In either case, we should trust him enough to both ask and to follow.

God bless, Vicci