

A New Name

28 June 2020

St Peter's Patronal Festival

Reading: Matthew 16:13-19

Open the Bible to us in a fresh and exciting way.
In Jesus Name.

Names are very important. Bruce Williams, a member of our congregation, was telling me how, when he was presented as a child to be baptised, the priest got his name wrong. He was meant to be called Richard. But for some reason best known to the Vicar he was named Bruce and the name stuck forever. I'm just pleased the priest didn't sneeze.

In our reading for St Peter's Day is a very important moment. You could almost miss it if you aren't careful. It's a very important moment for us because without this moment we might be called St Bruce's. The moment comes in verse 18: "And I tell you," commands Jesus, "You are Peter." From now on Simon will be called Peter or Rockman. In Greek *petra* means stone. In Aramaic, the language most Jews spoke, the name given to Simon is *kepha* which means stone. We are now very used to this idea and see Peter as having rock like faith.

But I think Jesus is actually doing something very clever here. If we examine the evidence, Peter is actually anything but a rock. He is very unreliable. His name could actually be *Flaky*. He was the one you might remember who disowned Jesus at his trial and not once but three times. Peter is the one who wants to take violent revenge on the arresting soldier and starts by cutting off his ear. He doesn't get Jesus' commitment to nonviolence. Peter is the one who tries to talk Jesus out of his calling. Peter is the one who doesn't get Jesus' commitment to humility and wants a seat for himself at his right hand. Rather than being a solid foundation Peter is actually, to be honest, pretty flaky. Jesus is giving Peter his new name in order to transform him. Jesus is giving him the

name ‘ Rock’ in order to help him grow into his full potential. Jesus is giving him this new name in order to affirm Peter into being his best self.

The other night we had a few friends over, which is just as well, because we only have a few friends. We all began telling school stories. The stories all had the same plot. Each of us in our own way had learned at school that we were dumb, even though later in life it turned out we weren’t.

My parents kept moving and so I was at yet another new school. The teacher had allowed each of the groups to name themselves. The bottom group was all boys. They had called themselves the Tigers. The middle group was boys and girls. They had called themselves the Kiwis. The top group was all girls. They had called themselves the Fairies. I sat the test. I can remember deliberately failing it so that I didn’t end up a Fairy.

For whatever reason, most of us have a lie that we pick up somewhere that we are thick, or ugly, or uncoordinated or socially awkward. Whatever it is, this lie holds us back from being all that God has made us to be.

I meet people of all ages who have believed a lie told to them from very young. “Oh, I can’t do that,” they say, “I’ m ….”

Since churches are just a collection of people, they too have their own self-perpetuating lies. “We’ re just a small congregation … We don’t have the money … We are all old people … The church is dying …” All of these things, and many more, I have heard over the years.

As we gather on this our Patronal Festival, what name would Jesus give us the congregation of St Peter’ s? What name would he use to bring out the very best in us? Let’s try a few.

Faithful Ones: the congregation of St Peter’ s has been loyal to its calling to proclaim the gospel of love in this community since 1858. That’ s a lot of haircuts. Across three centuries the people of St Peter’s have been the faithful ones. Jesus could choose to call us faithful.

Jesus might choose to call us Innovative. Beginning with a primary school, then starting St Barnabas in Fendalton, then St Christopher's in Avonhead, then Petersgate Counselling Centre, then Keeping Good Company, then a Christian preschool then ... the list goes on ... Jesus could call us innovative.

Jesus might call us Inclusive. As our restoration song goes all are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place. We have specialised caring groups where colour and age and gender are no barrier to belonging. Remember that the name Jesus would give us would remind us and call us to being our very best self.

Maybe Jesus would name us all three. He might call us 'my faithful, innovative, inclusive friends'. And immediately like Peter we would be encouraged to be our very best.

You may remember the story of Helen of Troy. According to legend this beautiful queen was captured and carried away and became a victim of amnesia. She became a prostitute and not remembering her name, or her royal blood wandered from street to street.

Back in her homeland an old friend never gave up hope that she was still alive. Determined to find her, he went to new lands and searched high and low. One day he saw a tattered woman with deep lines across her face. There was something about her that seemed familiar, so he went up to her, "What is your name?" he asked. What she said made no sense, so he asked to see her hands. She held them out. Then the old friend knew this was Helen. "You are Helen." he said, "You are Helen." She looked up astonished. The fog began to clear. "I am Helen." She discovered her lost self. Putting her arms around her friend she went. And he carried her home where she became the queen she was born to be.

We too are wandering in land that is not our own. We may have forgotten who we are until one day an old friend comes and shows us His hands. They are pierced hands. It is then he utters the name we have long forgotten - 'child of God'. Then we remember, "I am a child of God, created in the image and

likeness of God. I am of a royal priesthood. I have been chosen and named and called.” And the wounded one carries us home rejoicing.