

Second Sunday after the Epiphany: January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020, Rev. Karen Freeman  
Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 40:1-12; 1 Cor. 1:1-9; John 1:29-42  
What is your name?

So, our Bishop is a tough act to follow! But last Sunday was marvelous, wasn't it? Each of our candidates for Confirmation and Reception into the Episcopal Church was prayed for by name that their faith would continue to grow in a mighty way through the power of the Holy Spirit. In her sermon, Bishop Megan mentioned some brand names like Shasta soda, iPhone etc, illustrating, if I remember correctly, the fact that as disciples of Christ we are each *known* and *called by name* to follow Jesus through our baptismal covenant. As followers of Christ we have a new identity – a new brand name, if you will – and that identity is solidly based on Jesus Christ.

In our Gospel reading today one of the people who turn to follow Christ is **Simon** and through his encounter with Christ he is given a new name: Cephas, an Aramaic name which translates into Greek as Petros and into English it's Peter, and it means "Rock." **Simon the Rock**. I wonder if Simon felt "rock-like" - or whether he felt unworthy of his new name. Rocks are stable, dependable things, right? When we think of people in our lives who've been our "rock" during difficult times, that means they've been faithful to us or stood by us when we needed them.

When we think of the disciple Simon Peter – Simon “the Rock” – well, we see someone who, along with the other disciples often wavered in his faith, was impulsive and even denied knowing Jesus at a critical time right after his arrest. But Jesus knew that much later, Simon Peter would have a vital leadership role in developing the Church. In Matthew’s Gospel Jesus says, “I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church.” Peter is traditionally considered to have been the first bishop of Rome. And from the day Simon Peter first met Jesus, Jesus had the vision that Simon Peter would eventually acquire the character of his new name.

Our Gospel today doesn’t only present us with the story of the calling of the first disciples and re-naming of Simon – our Gospel also gives us important insight into the identity of Jesus himself, with the names that he is called within this passage: Lamb of God, the Son of God, Rabbi (which translated means Teacher) and Messiah (which is translated Anointed).

The day after John baptized Jesus, John sees Jesus approaching him and says to the people around him, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” That “Lamb of God” nametag could be a reference to several descriptors: the Passover lamb, important to the Hebrew people as a symbol of their freedom from slavery in Egypt;

the sacrificial lamb referenced in Isaiah 53:7; or the daily temple sacrifices where a lamb was offered morning and evening in Exodus 29:38-46; the substitute lamb that God provided to Abraham in order to preserve Isaac's life in Genesis 22:8; or the triumphant eschatological Lamb of Revelation 5. For the Jewish people at the time of Jesus, lamb sacrifices were important memorials of deliverance, forgiveness of sin, and messianic salvation. As the Lamb of God, Jesus becomes a sacrifice provided by God, and his death carries away the sin of mankind.

There's a wonderful Bible out called "Mirror Study Bible: the Romance of the Ages," by Francois du Toit. It's a paraphrase of the original Greek New Testament with commentary on various passages, and Du Toit paraphrases our verse like this: "Behold the Lamb of God; this is the one who would lift the sin of the cosmos like an anchor from the sea floor, for mankind to sail free!"

Du Toit comments that "It is not about a revengeful god demanding a sacrifice; this is your Father and Creator providing himself as sacrifice. The ultimate sacrifice for sins would never be something we did, or brought to God to appeal to him; the shocking scandal of the cross, is the fact that mankind is confronted with the extravagant, embarrassing proportions of the love of their Maker; Father Son and Spirit would go

to the most ridiculous extreme to finally convince us of their heart towards us! In order to persuade us of our worth, God speaks the most severe scapegoat language: “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world!” This completely disarms religion!” Du Toit continues, “Suddenly there is nothing that we can do to persuade God about our sincere intentions; this is God persuading us of [God’s] eternal love dream! ...to take up or away [our sin]; ...to raise the [weight of the] anchor [so that we might be enabled] to sail away”.

This is what Jesus asks us to “come and see.” Those who would follow Jesus and learn from him as their Teacher would see the effect of the incarnation – of God with us – through the life and work of Jesus, through his death, resurrection and ascension, and through the coming of the Holy Spirit. Du Toit comments, “In the incarnation we have the prophetic word on exhibit, intercepting human history by assuming human form; thus we see divinity immersed into our humanity and declaring that there would be no stopping him from entering into our hell and deepest darkness. In dying our death, God would bring closure to every destructive mindset and futile fruit we inherited from Adam’s fall. Just as he was raised out of the water in his baptism, we would be co-elevated together with him in his resurrection into newness of life!”

Today's scripture readings are testimonies – revelations - epiphanies  
...from Isaiah: "Listen to me, O coastlands, pay attention, you people  
from far away! The Lord called me before I was born, while I was in my  
mother's womb *he named me* ...The Lord says, "I will give you as a light  
to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth";

...from the Psalm: "He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to  
our God; many shall see, and stand in awe, and put their trust in the  
Lord"; ...from Paul's letter testifying to his calling as an apostle, the  
calling of the church to be saints in the fellowship of Jesus Christ;

From John telling what he witnessed that day in the Jordan, the Spirit  
descending and remaining on Jesus. This Messiah is known by his  
unique anointing, his unparalleled identity in the Spirit of God.

...from the calling of the first disciples: Despite Simon Peter's frailty, his  
name signified Jesus' vision for what Peter will become. Peter would be  
a rock - a chip off the old block – just as we are to be a chip off the  
block who is our foundation and our cornerstone. Jesus Christ, the  
Lamb of God, Son of God, Rabbi, Messiah, has lifted our sin for us to sail  
free. He has called us and has a new name for us.

What's *your* name?