

20/06/2024 Isaiah 43:1-3a Funeral of Paul Collyer

The Isaiah reading was one of Paul's favourite texts

This is how it begins:

But now thus says the LORD,

he who created you, O Jacob,

he who formed you, O Israel:

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;

I have called you by name, you are mine.

I have called you by your name...

We all have names, as a rule given to us by our parents.

From our earliest days we hear our name with special attention,

And even if we share our name with many people,

When we hear it spoken, even in a crowded room,

Our ears prick up.

More than this, when hear our name spoken by somebody we love,

By somebody who loves us,

Then we can come alive.

One thing that we don't pay so much attention to

In our modern world is the meaning of names.

But if you look into it, most names have meanings.

So, if you look up the meaning of the name 'Paul'

You will find that it means 'small' or 'humble'.

Today it's good to recognise that it was apt for Paul to be so named,

Not because he was small in stature,

But because he had a God-given humility that showed itself

In his willingness to serve; in his care of others – including his brothers-

And in his love for his Lord and his family.

So: Paul was the name given by his parents,

And, in a manner of speaking, written on Paul when he was baptised,

When he was adopted as a member of the household of God.

Of course, we began this service with a remembrance of baptism –

With a recognition that on the 7th of April, 1935
God placed his name, the name of the Father, and of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit on Paul.

So: in his baptism Paul was given his name,
But also had God's name, in a manner of speaking,
Written on him.

When we value things, we put our names on them.
This is something I do with many of my possessions
Especially the books in my library.
As it happens some of my most valued books
Have become dog eared and worn through much use.
In fact, it's the wear and tear, the dog ears and the damage,
That show how much I have used the books
And how much they mean to me; how much I love them.
My name is on those books,
If I lose them, I want to find them,
If I loan them out, I want them back.

In the Isaiah reading that Paul loved,
God's people had suffered the wear and tear of exile.
It could seem to outsiders that God could not love a people
That he let so suffer.
It could seem that God would not want a people back
Who had been lost from their home.
But God had called his people by name,
And he was the one who would redeem his people,
Who would buy them out of slavery
And bring them back into a secure homeland.

This meant that, even though the path from exile back home
Would involve struggle and difficulty and suffering,
It would not be a sign of abandonment by God
Or a sign that God was far from them.

Far from it.

This is what God spoke to his people through the prophet:

**When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.**

**For I am the LORD your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.**

The Lord, the God who is merciful and gracious,
Slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,
He is the one who would be with his people
To guide them back home.

The Lord would be true to his name
In showing mercy and love to his people.

I never spoke with Paul about this text,
So I don't know what its special significance was for him.
But I do know that he was a man of faith:
A man who confessed that he was a sinner in need of forgiveness,
A man who held out his empty hands to Jesus his Lord,
And a man who looked in hope
For the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.
Paul, in other words, was a man who trusted that Jesus
Had been with him through the vicissitudes of life,
And would guide him through death
To eternal life with God.

Today, as we commend Paul to God,
We proclaim Jesus, and his victory over death and the grave.
The name 'Jesus' means 'the Lord saves'
And it is Jesus who knows Paul by name
And who will call Paul out of death into life with him.
It is Jesus, whose name was placed on Paul in holy baptism,
Who will bring Paul to his true and lasting home
With angels and archangels and all the company of heaven.

Today I want to close with a story from the Gospels: from one time
That Jesus called someone by name,
And in calling them by name brought them from grief
Into the joy of the resurrection.
We read this at the end of John's Gospel,
Where Mary Magdalene has come to the tomb on Easter Sunday
Expecting to tend to the dead body of Jesus,
But sees the empty tomb and assumes someone has taken Jesus' body.
She goes and tells the disciples what has happened
But then returns to the tomb.

This is what we read: **But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.' When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher).**

It is in being called by name by the risen Lord
That Mary sees the living Jesus, that she turns from grief to joy
From being a messenger of death to being a messenger of life.

People baptised into Christ,
Who are known by name and who bear God's name,
God is with you in your grief,
And Jesus, who lives, who has called Paul through death to life,
Is with you: listen to him
And he will bring you with him and all God's faithful people
To the joy and peace of life with God.
In Jesus' name. Amen.

