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Christ Church West Wimbledon
Sermon : May 26th, 2019
“Sixth Sunday of Easter”

SERMON EASTER 6 2019 CCWW

‘Hello Michael – how are you?’ Not, you might imagine, an exceptional thing for anyone to say to me. But this was said by a local shopkeeper who I had only met once before about a year ago. I was absolutely astounded that he had remembered my name after just one meeting many months before. That did feel good – that I was named and remembered for who I am.

What’s in a name? "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet" is a popular reference to William Shakespeare's play Romeo and Juliet, in which Juliet seems to argue that it does not matter that Romeo is from her family's rival house of Montague, that he is named "Montague". “That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet”: Juliet knows that the blood feud prevents her, a Capulet, from loving a Montague. She ponders it. It's only your name that's the enemy; so you are what you are, even though you may be a Montague, she concludes.

What’s in a name? Your name, my name is really important – and that’s why it jars when you are called by the wrong name – or even worse just called ‘mate’ as a generic term. I had a Bishop once who called everyone ‘mate’. The Dean soon put a stop to that when he drily commented to the Bishop ‘even my plumber doesn’t call me mate’.

What’s in a name? Naming a child is one of the trickiest things that confronts a couple after the birth of a child. It’s got to be a name that is right, that feel’s right. I always ask the family to publicly announce at the font the name by which a child is to be baptised, just before the child is baptised and offered to Christ. Woe betide of course the Vicar who gets the name wrong. It was when I misread a name at a funeral that I knew I needed urgently to go the Specsavers – I really did.

In our first reading today we read part of Paul’s missionary work amongst the Gentiles and of a specific encounter with one person. It is special that we know the

name of this woman who was a worshipper of God and who responded to what Paul was saying – Lydia, a beautiful name of Greek origin which means kind. So it was that she was baptised by name and her whole household with her – and then she repaid Paul and his companions with generous hospitality.

In today's Gospel, one verse before the start of the passage we heard read John writes this: "Judas said – the other Judas, not Iscariot – 'Lord how has it come about that you mean to disclose yourself to us and not to the world?' – and then we heard the answer of Jesus in today's reading. The point is that John quite rightly thought it was important that the reader should know exactly which Judas had asked the question – he needed to get his name right.

The churches where I have worked have been all special: two were called 'All Saints', two were called 'St Mary' and others were named after Saints Giles, Leonard, Bartholomew and Mark. The ecumenical church in Milton Keynes was the imaginatively named 'Christ the Cornerstone' – and my last church was named after King Charles 1 – the martyr king who was beheaded by parliament in 1649.

But I would suggest that to be called 'Christ Church' is a real and great honour. Here in this bit of God's world we are all part of the family of Christ Church. That is a really special name by which we are known. I have no idea who suggested 160 years ago that the new daughter church of St Mary's to the west of Wimbledon should be called 'Christ Church' – but that is what we are called and we should delight in that name. We are not simply called after one of the many saints – we are called after Christ himself. That is very special. It is something we should aspire to be proud of – to be a member of 'Christ Church'.

With that name there is to be no doubt whose we are and who we follow as Christians. For we are the latest in a long line of Christians who are the descendants of those first disciples over 2,000 years ago, who have been called by name to be today's followers. On Thursday we celebrate the Ascension of Christ which was immediately preceded by his commission as Matthew records it: "Jesus said to his disciples: Go therefore to all nations and make them my disciples; baptise them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teach them all that I have commanded you. And know that I will be with you always, to the end of time". Which is why this legendary story with which I finish might just be true:

'On his ascension into heaven. Jesus is met by the Archangel Gabriel who asks him, "Now that your work is finished, what plans have you made to ensure that your teachings will spread throughout the world?" Jesus answered, "I called some fishermen and tax-collectors to walk along with me as I did my Father's work." "Yes, I know about them," said Gabriel sneeringly, "but what other plans have you made?" Jesus replied, "I taught Peter, James and John about the kingdom of God; I taught Thomas about faith; and all of them were with me as I healed people and preached to the crowds." Gabriel gasped. "But what if they should fail? The whole enterprise will have been in vain. All that suffering on the cross will be wasted. Surely you must have other plans to make sure your work will carry on?"

The reply of Jesus was firm and confident. "I am depending upon them and I have made no other plans".

More than 2000 years later, he is now depending upon us, the family of Christ's Church. Amen.