

Reflections for August 23rd – 11th Sunday after Trinity

Peter – the rock

Names can be significant – and in the Bible there are many examples of people whose names are changed to reflect a significant change in their life.

The gospel reading this week tells us how Simon was given a new name by Jesus, and became Peter – the name we usually know him by. Peter is a fascinating character – he seems to be the sort of person who speaks his mind, and reacts in the moment. It is Peter who tried to walk on the water to get to Jesus, and Peter who said he would never abandon and deny Jesus – but who did exactly that when put to the test.

Sometimes Peter got things absolutely right, and sometimes he got things spectacularly wrong. And so, when Jesus gave Simon his new name of Peter, which means the *rock*, it is a name that reflects both sides of his nature.

He was given that new name when he became the first disciple to declare that Jesus is ‘the Messiah, the Son of the Living God’ – at his best Peter was the rock that is a firm foundation of faith on which the church could be built.

Yet, so soon after that, when Jesus began to tell his disciples clearly that he had to be handed over to the authorities, to suffer and die, Peter was the first to protest, and say that this must never happen – and then Jesus called him a ‘stumbling block’, the rock that is an obstacle to God’s will and purpose being fulfilled.

So, this Sunday we remember Peter, who was given a new name by Jesus, and who was a leader among the disciples, and played a vital role in the beginning and growth of the church, but who was far from perfect. We can be encouraged by Peter’s story, because the good news is that, if God can call and use people like Simon who became Peter, then God (who knows our ‘true name’, that is, knows who we really are) can call and use far from perfect people like us. And the good news and challenge of the gospel is that God *does* call and use people like us.

Revd John Waller

God, who has called us and loves us,
and who knows our true name:
help each one of us to become more fully
the person you have made us to be,
in the power of the Spirit, and in the name of Jesus.
Amen.

Bible readings: Isaiah 51. 1-6; Romans 12. 1-8; Matthew 16. 13-20