

Second Sunday in Lent - Reflection Service - Anthea Kenna



We take a breath and come into God's presence.

Holy Spirit draw us close and minister your grace to us. May we recognise your presence in our midst. **Amen.**

God of Sarah and Abraham, long ago you embraced your people in covenant and promised them your blessing. Strengthen us in faith, that, with your disciples of every age, we may proclaim your deliverance in Jesus Christ to generations yet unborn. **Amen.**

Bible Reading: Genesis 17 1-7, 15, 16

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous." Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her."

Reflection – Anthea Kenna What's in a Name?

Reading today's Old Testament text from Genesis, I was reminded of the well-known question, 'What's in a Name?' which took me back to my schools days studying Shakespeare, *"What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet"* (from *Romeo and Juliet*)

Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* made this question famous. They fall in love before learning they bear the names of rival families. Romeo is a Montague and Juliet a Capulet. Willing to deny name before love, Juliet cries out, "Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou, Romeo? Deny thy father and refuse thy name. Or if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love, and I'll no longer be a Capulet." A few lines later, Juliet asks, "What's in a name? That which we call a rose, by any other name would smell as sweet."

In some other settings, the family name becomes even more important. I read this story of a young boy, "I watched my father endure the pain of a failed business that left my parents deeply in debt. Rather than declare bankruptcy, he went to each of his creditors and told them he would fully pay them back if it took the rest of his life. On his handshake and his name, each creditor took him at his word. He kept his promise, furthering his credibility and example of integrity in the business community".

In today's reading from Genesis we see the significance of a name was particularly true in Bible times and we read, in both Old and New Testaments, names that reflected personal experience or expressed character. Today we read of the covenant God made with Abram, "No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations." (v5).

In some cultures, parents give their children names that have special meanings—Native Americans come to mind—and a person's name might be changed later to commemorate a significant accomplishment by that person.

God, on several occasions, changed a person's name to signify a change in that person's life and relationship with him. In this instance, God changes Abram's name to Abraham and gives the reason—"for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations." *Ab* means "father." God combines Abram's original name with the Hebrew word for "father of a multitude"—*'ab-hamon*—to create the new name, Abraham.

In other books of the Bible, we may read and understand the importance of a name in Biblical terms. In Proverbs 22:1 we read, "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, loving favour rather than silver and gold." ... But if one has to choose between them, Solomon says, "Choose a good name."

The Hebrews certainly believed that one's name lived on in one's descendants (Gen. 48:16), and that without male heirs one's name, "may be blotted out of Israel" (Deuteronomy 25:10 NKJV)

Later in verse 5 we see the words, "for I have made you" indicating an action already accomplished. God has already made Abraham the father of many nations, even though Abraham has not yet fathered Isaac, who will be the child of promise. God has set the action in motion. All that remains is for Abraham to exercise patience and faith while awaiting the fulfilment of the promise. This may also be confirmed in Ecclesiastes, "Whatever one is, he has been named already, For it is known that he *is* man; And he cannot contend with Him who is mightier than he". (Ecclesiastes 6:10)

Then God says to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her." Just as God changed Abram's name to Abraham to acknowledge the covenant relationship, so also God changes Sarai's name to Sarah. God confers on Sarah the same blessings that he bestowed earlier on Abraham (albeit in different words). She can expect to give birth to a son and to receive God's blessings. She will be mother to nations and kings, just as Abraham will be their father.

In verse 7, God expands the covenant even further. Not only will the covenant apply to Abraham, but it will also apply to his offspring "throughout their generations"—an everlasting covenant. Throughout the rest of time, there will never be a time when God is not the God of Abraham's offspring.

A name, or identity, is a powerful thing. It is a descriptor that allows people to make quick judgments and assumptions about us. While we can understand the harm of assumptions, for the human mind it is a fast way to categorize a lot of information in a short amount of time. Our names may also stand as a substitute for our physical

self. Our name, in the form of a signature on a legal document, binds us legally to certain obligations.

Names have always been important. We may also read in the Bible, the many times that God has instructed someone to call their unborn child by a particular name. I wonder if you know why your parents chose your name? My mother chose my name from a book she had read and enjoyed – I was named before my birth. My middle name is a family name and the name, along with a Bible, has been passed down the female line of the family. It continues with my daughter and granddaughter. Thankfully, it is a pleasing name.

We like for people to call us by name, and hearing our name called tends to get our attention, even if the voice is distant—perhaps especially if the voice is distant. God, through Jesus, calls us and we have to be ready to listen.

During Lent I have been following the Church of England's, 'Live Lent App' (easily downloaded, simple to read and free!) which is looking at 'Living God's Story'. On day 3 it writes about Jesus calling us and inviting us into God's story, encouraging us to invite others. Never think you're alone or forgotten, for God says to you, "I have even called you by your name" (Isaiah 45:4). Yes! God calls each one of you by name. No matter, what the challenges you face, or the most impossible situation you get caught into; God will never leave you.

The readings for this second Sunday in Lent invite us to listen and to trust that God will lead us in ways that are life-giving. Are you listening?

Worship Music

At the name of Jesus

<https://youtu.be/r4d4UXSjXig>

Jesus, Name Above all Names

<https://youtu.be/V-X1EoecpeE>

Will you come and follow me (The Summons)

<https://youtu.be/LKkpNbuVDfw>

Take up thy cross

<https://youtu.be/t5xlxaesqOg>

Prayers of Intercession

O God, who have commanded us to listen to your beloved Son be pleased, we pray, to nourish us inwardly by your word, that, with spiritual sight made pure, we may rejoice to behold your glory We pray for the grace to listen and to trust more fully in Jesus this Lent so that we, too, may "walk in the presence of the Lord".

Let us pray, thanking God for his loving faithfulness and bringing to him our own concerns and the needs of the world around us.

Lord, we pray for your church during this season of Lent. We pray that all of us who believe in you will be strengthened to remain faithful to our calling; to work for understanding and unity where we have created divisions and to show your love and compassion to each other and to all your children.

For leaders of nations, for economists and for politicians, that God's radiant light will shine on them and that they will bring true peace, with justice, to their people.

Lord, we pray for the countless number who suffer in this world because of violence, oppression and injustice. We pray for all who suffer because of flood or drought, lack of food, clean water or medical help and supplies.

Lord, we pray for our own communities and churches. We thank you for our families and friends and pray especially for those in particular need today. We pray that your peace and love will surround them bringing them comfort and strength.

We pray for ourselves that we may learn to see more clearly the needs of others and to respond to those needs for they are our brothers and sisters.

Lord, we thank you for those who have travelled before us on the way of the cross and are now at peace in your eternal presence. Help us to live in the assurance of your promise to us that this road of faith will lead into your kingdom.

Lord we thank you that you receive our prayers with grace, mercy and love. Trusting in your compassion and faithfulness we commend to you all those for whom we have prayed and commit ourselves to seeking to do your will and to bringing in your kingdom here on earth. **Amen.** *(Katharine Smith)*

We take a moment to lift the prayers of our own hearts before God

We commend ourselves and the whole of creation to God's unfailing love. **Amen.**

Joining all our prayers together we say the prayer our saviour taught us:

**Our Father, who art in heaven;
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive them that trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

Blessing

Christ, whose glory fills the skies,
fill you with radiance
And the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be with you and those whom you love always. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord: **In the name of Christ. Amen.**

Additional Resources

www.churchofengland.org/LiveLent

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