

## Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> June 2021 – Acts 4:1-20 ‘No other name’

Last Friday Harry and Meghan’s second child was born. Inevitably, the news rapidly spread across the world over the weekend, not least because of their new daughter’s name: Lilibet Diana. It was a conscious nod towards both The Queen, Harry’s grandmother, whose family nickname is Lilibet, and of course, his mum. And, almost as inevitably, the rest of the week has featured various stories and counter-stories as to whether the Queen was consulted regarding use of the name Lilibet.

Whilst on one level, it’s hard not to throw up our hands and wonder why the media feels the need to make a row out of everything, and what that says about our health as a society, on the other hand it reminds us that **names matter**. Whatever the rights and wrongs of this particular episode, the choice of names has huge symbolic significance. They’re not just labels, or titles: there are themes here of reconciliation, of family heritage and identity – things which matter.

In most cultures around the world and throughout history, names have played a similar function. This was certainly true of the historic Jewish culture in which Jesus was raised. Children were often given their ‘real’ lifelong names not at birth but when they were older, to reflect something of their personality or their destiny.

In many ways, our culture is quite unusual: names are given at birth, often well before birth, and relatively few parents check what the names of their children mean. In times past, they were often chosen for family reasons, as would also be true for Harry and Meghan; more recently because of how they sound, or personal preference, or perhaps through association with some culture they like, or some famous person they admire. Many names have rather surprising meanings, which I suspect some parents might feel a bit more nervous about if they had checked!

So it’s not surprising when Peter and John are hauled before the religious authorities that the first question they ask is: ‘by what *name* did you do this?’ (v7) There were many competing schools of thought, and often young disciples would follow a particular rabbi. The name signified more than just a particular affiliation: it was a way of thinking, of living, a worldview.

And Peter pulls no punches, does he: as well as pointing out (with heavy irony) that what the authorities appear to be objecting to is an act of kindness, **he makes it clear in whose name they are operating**: ‘know this, you and all the people of Israel: it is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.’ (v10)

In fact Peter goes further: ‘Salvation is found in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to humankind by which we must be saved.’ (v12) In today’s pluralist culture, we may consider that this claim is particularly challenging – but, in reality, this has always been so. It was just as explosive then – both to these authorities, and later to the Roman Emperors who ruled them.

But if it sounds overly narrow to our ears, we have to go back the name itself. Names matter. Names have meaning. And **Jesus' name has a particularly important meaning: it means 'God saves'**. Jesus' story and his identity are bound up with his name: Jesus is the God who saves.

So it's no surprise that Peter says: *this* is where humanity finds its salvation. *The clue is in the name*. Jesus is the name given to all of us whereby we can be put right with God, we can find salvation. Even the word salvation itself means more than just forgiveness: it's the Greek version of the Jewish word 'shalom' – it means complete wholeness or wellbeing. In other words, Jesus is the whole ball game: the vision of wholeness made flesh, and in whom we too can find that wholeness.

And the pattern of our discipleship, our following of Jesus, is directed by what Jesus can put his name to. Hence Jesus tells us to pray for things 'in his name'. Peter commands the man to be healed 'in Jesus name.' And even our very identity – 'Christians' – is based on Jesus' name. The word Christian means 'little Jesus': we don't follow a philosophy, or a religion or a lifestyle – **we carry a name**. We are little Jesuses, living and loving and blessing in the name of the person whose name is now the centre-point of our lives, the heartbeat of our identity.

It's time the Western church recovered the importance of its name. As a culture we've cheapened the value of a name, and thereby undermined one of the central foundations of our faith. Names matter. Jesus' name is the name above all names, not least because it points us directly towards the path of life. That life allows us to take his name as well. **We become more than believers or participants, we become little Jesuses – Christians**. And now, our lives are directed, like Peter's, to living in this name: the beautiful, wonderful and powerful name of Jesus.

May that name be not just our salvation but our life, our hope, our joy, our purpose, our peace, our inspiration today. It's all in the name. Amen.