

## **Readings & Sermon for Thursday April 2**

### **Genesis 17: 3-9**

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 (Great Father) but your name shall be Abraham (Father of a multitude); 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. And I will give to you, and to your offspring after you, the land where you are now an alien, all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding; and I will be their God.' God said to Abraham, 'As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations.'

### **John 8: 51-end**

Very truly, I tell you, whoever keeps my word will never see death. 'The Jews said to him, 'Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, and so did the prophets; yet you say, "Whoever keeps my word will never taste death." Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets also died. Who do you claim to be?' Jesus answered, 'If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, he of whom you say, "He is our God", though you do not know him. But I know him; if I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you. But I do know him and I keep his word. Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad.'

Then the Jews said to him, 'You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?' Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I AM.' So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

## Sermon for Thursday April 2<sup>nd</sup>

There is something deeply significant to our sense of self about our name. Is anyone else spending time wandering round the house talking to themselves by name? Maybe it's just me but in the silence and solitude it seems necessary to hear one's own name. Names matter. After Creation, Adam's first task was to give each animal a name. If you name something you have power over it. Teachers know that – and good teachers make an effort to learn their pupils' names swiftly. Changing our names is significant. Christians used to take a new name at baptism to signify their new life. Abraham had such an overwhelming experience of the presence of God that he changed his name from Abram meaning 'Great Father' to Abraham meaning 'Father of many.' Jesus changed Simon's name to Peter meaning 'rock.' And Jesus's Hebrew name 'Jeshua' given to him by the angel Gabriel is significant. It means, 'The one who saves.'

The name of God was believed to be so powerful, so loved and feared by the Israelites, that, in the end, it was never spoken aloud. But they knew the name, and they knew it meant 'I AM' or 'I AM what I AM' or, 'I will be what I will be.' The Didache, an early Christian liturgy from the first century says 'Where two or more speak of the Lord, he is present'. To name of God or even to speak together of God without naming, brought one into the presence of God.

In the Gospel reading, we hear of Jesus arguing in the temple with the priests and the scribes about eternal life. Jesus was talking about living life in the presence of God as he himself did. 'Whoever keeps my word will never see death, he said,' meaning, I think, his message of love of God and love of neighbour. Whoever lives as he did, in the living presence of God, is already halfway to the kingdom of heaven and will never see death.'

And caught up in the argument he spoke the sacred name. 'Before Abraham was,' he said, 'I AM,' using the sacred name without embarrassment or ego because in truth, he and the Father are one. He alone could speak the name which invokes the presence. The temple officials reacted to this profound revelation not with astonishment and worship but with anger. They threatened to stone him and from then on they plotted his death.

As we look towards the events of Holy week, we too have a name that is sacred, a name which, since our baptism each wear invisibly on our foreheads, and reverence in our hearts; the name at which every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.