

Thought for the Day

Thought for the day is based on one of the day's lectionary readings.

For the Bible online, go to: <http://bible.oremus.org/>

Choose your version (we use NRSV in church)

Copy and paste the reference into the search box and the passage will be displayed.

Friday 1st January

The Naming of Jesus

Acts 3.1-16

Happy New Year everyone, on this New Year's Day of 2021. May this year bring you and all of us greater health and well being than last year. May this be the year when we beat Covid and get 'back to normal'.

It is also the 8th day of Christmas, the day when the church celebrates the naming of Jesus, the ceremony which would have taken place on the 8th day of his life when he was circumcised as a member of the Jewish people and given his name, Jesus. Scripture does not give us an account of this although it does for John the Baptist.

The reading for today invites us to consider 'what's in a name?'

Does it make a difference to today that we call it New Year's Day? Well yes it does because we feel it's a special date, a new start in a way, we look back and look forward at the gateway of the year. At the same time it is a day like any other and the turn of the year could have been on another day.

When I was a teacher before ordination I remember how much more effective it was if I needed to tell someone off, to use their name rather than 'you there', or whatever. Equally praise was more personal when using their name. It used to take me ages each year to learn them all!

What about the name Jesus? 'Jesus' has the same meaning as 'Joshua': Saviour. Names in Scripture often have special meaning and even power. In a number of ancient cultures, names are associated with knowledge and power. The disciples in Acts looked at the lame man and Peter said I don't have anything to give you like money, but what I do have is the name of Jesus; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk. And he did. You will know the hymn 'At the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow' which is based on Philippians chapter 2. There is a rather delightful irony or paradox in this passage which describes how the son of God emptied himself to be born human and poor, and to die a cursed death on the cross; which as a result meant that God exalted him and raised his name above every other name, 'so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord'. The power which resides in this name was laid down voluntarily before it was taken up again. The name has power because of being laid down. That is a mark of genuine power, of power with integrity, power that is blended with humility.

Often in our prayers we say 'in the name of Jesus, Amen'. What do we mean when we use that formula? Jesus promised that when we pray in his name, our prayer would be answered. What does it mean to pray in his name, is it about using that phrase at the end? Well of course it is more than that, and that phrase is no magic charm. What Peter and John did that day with the lame man is what Jesus would have done if he was there in the flesh. They had seen him do it, they knew. So they could invoke his name with confidence.

Our prayers are answered when we pray as if we were Jesus, prayers which he would pray, requests that he would share. When we are so identified with Jesus that our longings are his, what we pray for, will be granted, and we will be truly praying 'in his name'. Don't assume though that the answers will come in the way we expect or want. Always remember his prayers in the garden of Gethsemane. Not my will but yours be done. If we put ourselves first in our prayers, we are unlikely to get the answer we want. So as we pray for the coming year; not our will, but thine, be done.

Keep us, good Lord, under the shadow of your mercy in this time of uncertainty and distress. Sustain and support the anxious and fearful, and lift up all who are brought low; that we may rejoice in your comfort, knowing that nothing can separate us from your love in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.