

Gleaning In The Fields Of Light

Our Christening

By Ken Woodley

“You are to be called Cephas,” Jesus told Simon. And thus Peter was “christened” in the most extraordinary way—by Christ. What better “Christener” could there be?

Nicknames have a long history, but Peter is not the first nickname one encounters in the New Testament. John the Baptist has that honor.

I would not be surprised at all if our Good Shepherd—there’s a nickname, too—had an affectionate name for all of his sheep—including the child we christen through baptism on Sunday at St. Anne’s. I wonder what the Lord calls each of us in his heart of hearts?

Peter means “rock” in Greek and Cephas is the Aramaic translation of “rock.” Peter would have had no idea why Jesus suddenly christened him. But Jesus knew Peter would become a rock upon which the Good News of God’s love and grace would survive and then flourish. Traveling all the way to us today.

I can imagine affectionate nicknames Jesus might have for each of you, based on the unique qualities of personhood you contribute to the St. Anne’s family.

When I was a very small child my mother read aloud to me. I’ve shared this with you before, but she began calling me “Inkwell” because a story involving an inkwell became one of my early childhood favorites. Pretty prophetic, as it turns out, with over 36 years of journalism, these weekly meditations, Forward Day By Day writings and a published book under my belt.

If Jesus called me Inkwell it would probably be because were I writing with an old-fashioned pen I’d certainly have ink all over me and probably most of the furniture.

Jesus barely knew Simon when he changed his name to Peter. Simon’s brother Andrew had spent the day with Jesus, leaving at four o’clock in the afternoon to go find Simon and take him to see the Messiah for himself.

“He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said ... ‘You are Peter.’”

There was no preliminary conversation. No chitchat. Jesus didn’t engage in small talk. Not then or ever. Everything Jesus said was BIG. With just one look Jesus knew Simon’s heart and what Simon would mean to the world. Just as Jesus knows what we mean to the world, and to each other. And how that can continue to grow and grow.

Jesus’s instant reaction to Peter shows just how quickly he falls in love with us. It is always love at first sight. Jesus holds nothing back. He doesn’t play it cool or coy. He gives his love in an instant and keeps loving us forever.

And at our deepest level—warts and all.

While I wouldn’t be surprised if Jesus has special names for each of us, I am certain there is one affectionate nickname we all share in the heart of Christ: “Beloved.”

There could be no better nickname in all of the world.

That nickname is our light in the darkness.

A nickname that forever shines from the heart of Jesus into the depths of our journeying souls.

If only all of us—all over the nation and the world—could see each other as Jesus does:

Beloved.

The christening waters from the baptismal font soon dry upon the forehead of every child.

The living water of God’s love never does, and it can never be wiped away.

Even though some people try.

The world would have fewer swords and far more plowshares if we christened and re-christened each other with with that word—beloved.

On every heart-beating corner of this earth.

Every single day.

