

dreams you had when you were at school. And the answer is yes of course I do, but the reality is I wouldn't be here now, if I hadn't been through those things...out of all that rubbish God made something worthwhile...and gave me something precious.

Like the Israelites of old, we all have our past, families we've come from, things we've done, mistakes we've made, but, where we've been, and what we've done has shaped us into who we are today.

We might not, and don't have to be proud of everything we've done, been, and said, but it's our story. But what we've been doesn't have to determine who we become. There are of course some whose choices leave a lot to be desired; people who have cheated, despised, rejected. Then there are those who have been recipients of others actions and those who maybe have been on both sides of the fence.

Maybe our names haven't always been what we have hoped and wanted, but today's story from Genesis gives us hope that we can all have a new name, a new identity. That what, and who we were and are can be different to what we can become and be.

Jacob the deceiver, gained a new name 'Israel', given to him by God because Israel meant one who struggled with God and conquered.

In Paul's letter to the Romans we read....

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written:

"For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In the Eucharist we celebrate the name of one who is above every name, one who has conquered on our behalf. O who we read in the book of revelation will give us a new name.

His name is Jesus and he has the power to change and transform us from what we were to who we are meant to be. **Amen.**

St Mary's Sanderstead\St James Riddlesdown. 20.10.19 - Fr. Grant Cohen

Genesis 32:22-31

"God knows my name"

I wonder if you've ever asked yourself how many times you are photographed in a day? When you walk into the bank, go into the supermarket, drive on the motorway there is a camera marking your every move. Lights on street corners and cameras mounted on walls, watching you and monitoring who you are and what you do.

Big brother is watching you was a phrase coined by George Orwell in his novel '1984.'

A keynote speaker was in such a hurry to get to the venue that when he arrived and sat down at the head table, he suddenly realized that had forgotten his dentures.

Turning to the man next to him, he whispered, "You won't believe this but I forgot my teeth!" The man said, "Why that's no problem." And with that he reached into his briefcase and pulled out a pair of dentures. "Try these," he said. "Ooh no they're too loose," he said.

The man dug around in his briefcase again. "Then try these."

The speaker tried them and responded. "Too tight."

The man didn't seem flustered, but dived straight back into his briefcase gave him another pair.

The speaker smiled. "They fit perfectly." He ate his meal and gave his speech without any further trouble. After the event concluded, the speaker went over to thank his benefactor and return the dentures.

"I want to thank you for coming to my rescue. Where is your office? I've been looking for a good dentist."

"Oh, I'm not a dentist," the man replied. "I'm the local funeral director."

We are not always who people think we are....and our names might not correspond with anything about us at all. However unfair it maybe, we are sometimes just who people think we are...When we think about famous people, we immediately associate their name with what they do. And so, there is Michael Jackson, Marilyn Monroe, JFK, Billy Graham, John Wesley, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John... Heroes of music, society and faith. But there are also names of monsters, Adolf Hitler, Saddam Hussain, Jeffrey Dahmer, people we wouldn't name our children after because of its association.

Your name, my name and the names of everyone will bring to mind the kind of person that we are in the eyes of others.

And back in the Old Testament names were chosen to reflect who the child was going to be. A prophetic statement of what was hoped and believed about them. So, Abram meant high father, while Abraham meant father of a great multitude. Moses means one who is drawn out, and Jesus means deliverer.

If I was to ask you your name, you would easily tell me, but if I asked who are you, you might struggle with the answer, you might say I am a teacher, an architect, a pianist or a shop worker but that not who you are, that is just what you do....

We are different things to different people, we are different selves. We are our known self what we and others see in us. The part that were able to discuss freely with others. We are our hidden self, what we see in ourselves but others don't. Parts were maybe ashamed of and keep secret for our own protection, areas where we feel vulnerable, our faults and weaknesses. Then there's our blind self, things we don't see in ourselves but others see in us. And finally, our unknown self, the things we cannot see, and others can't see either.

In our Old Testament reading we hear the story of Jacob, now Jacob, means deceiver...which is uncanny when we consider the story of his life... The culture of the day where our reading is taken was a patriarchal society, the father of the household held all the rights and the estate was passed down to the first-born son, and while every child received an inheritance, the first-born always received far more, it was their birth right. Primogeniture, something that still happens today. Now Esau happened to be the elder brother, and coming home one day he was hungry, and I guess there must have been a sense of sibling rivalry because Jacob on hearing that his brother was hungry had an idea. Their father, Isaac, the son of Abraham had grown old and blind and knew he was going to die, so he was going to give his blessing to Esau, the older of his two sons, but Jacob took advantage and at the suggestion of his mother, tricked both Esau and their father. He put goat hair on his hands and neck because were told that Esau was hairy, he wore his brothers' clothes so he would smell like him and he received the blessing of his father along with the full inheritance.

Now, I can hear you asking 'Well why didn't Isaac do something about it, when he found out' unfortunately we don't have time to consider those questions and how it was part of God's plan but unfortunately for Esau, the blessing Isaac gave could not be retracted.

So Jacob became exactly what his name meant...a deceiver...

In the cartoon strip Charley Brown, Charley says to Lucy, "Nobody likes me, everybody hates my guts. Do you see that plane up there, it's a plane full of people going somewhere else? That's what I'd like to do. I'd like to go somewhere else, somewhere where nobody knows me. Then with new people I could get a fresh start. Do you think that's what I ought to do, Lucy? Go get a fresh start with new people who don't know me?!"

And Lucy, replies, "Forget it, Charley Brown. Forget it. Once the new people got to know you, you'd be right back where you started from."

I don't know about you, but there's have been times in my life when I've thought exactly like Charlie brown. Times when I've wanted to be someone else even if just for a day. Days when I've wanted to be someone better, someone wiser, someone who God might love more.

In his book knowing God, the writer J.I. Packer says;

God knows me. I am engraved on the palms of his hands. I am never out of his mind, and all my knowledge of him depends on his sustained initiative in knowing me. I only know him only because he first knew me, and continues to know me. He knows me as a friend, one who loves me; and there isn't moment when his eyes are off me, or his attention distracted from me, and no moment, therefore, when his care falters.

A pastor called Brian Rosner calls what Packer and others say 'The Cinderella of theology' because we bring nothing to the table with God. We have no pedigree that would attract him to us, no earthly reason why he should look at us, be interested in us or want to save us, but the fact is he wants us far more than we can possibly imagine. Of course, when we struggle, when we face things in our lives' that threaten and upset us, such a statement is brought into question. So if God knows every time I bang my head, trap my finger, lose my keys, worry about my health, my home, my wife, or husband and cry out asking for help, where is he, and what is he doing...why doesn't he always turn things to my favour....? The answer is, I don't know...I don't know why God allows certain suffering except to say that he wasn't exempt to it himself. He let people abuse him, he let people reject and betray him and ultimately kill him. He allowed his people Israel to turn away from him and worship false gods and yet he remained steadfast and faithful. But what I do know is that whatever happens to us in this life, God is able to use it.

Isaiah 55 verse 8 says;

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts".

And in Romans 8: 28 we read:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Our short life is nothing compared to eternity which is where God dwells and where we one day will dwell with him and will I'm sure that in the light of eternity, we will think very differently about what we went through and how we reacted to it.

The fact is, God sees every accident. He knows when my tummy pain is so bad that I lie awake for hours. He's aware of my feelings of depression and the hopelessness that sometimes rages within my soul. He knows you and me and the things we face at every moment of every day or our lives and beyond. He knows each of your hospital appointments and the times when you sit on your own and cry because you miss your spouse. He knows your every irritation, every hurt and disappointment, he knows when you hope for things that don't happen and when people treat you differently to what you expect. All through the Bible we read about Israel's lowest points, but we also read that God reassured his people that he knew them, that their name was known to him before we even had been given it.

I'm sometimes asked 'Do you ever wonder what life might have been like if you'd never left home at 15, and made the bad decisions you did and instead been able to chase the