25-4-21 What’s in a name? (Acts4:5-12; John 10:0-18) A sermon for St James by Rev Steve Lees

This Sunday at St James I am privileged to be baptising a child. It’s really special for this reason; when I first came to St James back in 2013, the first baptisms I did were for Calum & Conor, who just so happen to be the older brothers of Stanley who will be the last baptism I do as Vicar here! This family, have accompanied me on my journey at St James!

Today, I ask the question, ‘What’s in a name?’ The name Stanley is of Old English origin and it means ‘Stone clearing.’ It was first used as a place name; so, you can go to the town of Stanley in County Durham, or the village of Stanley near Wakefield. Stanley was then used as a surname before being used as a first name. There have been a few famous Stanleys like Stan Laurel; one of the funniest comedians ever, and Stanley Matthews one of the greatest footballers ever!

In the service I baptise Stanley in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. *‘In the name of’*…this implies a sense of authority and association. Here’s a few examples: ‘I arrest you in the name of the law!’ ‘Stop, in the name of love!’ ‘In the name of the Queen, you must pay your tax!’ God has authority over all things, so when we use His name, it really matters, and Stanley, your baptism is a sign of your association with God; God loves you and calls you to be part of his family!

In our Bible reading from Acts, we heard about St Peter and St John getting into trouble! (something I’m sure never happens to Stanley!) Why were Peter and John in trouble? They had prayed for a sick man in the name of Jesus…and the man was healed! He went jumping and leaping and praising God! That’s’ a weird thing to be in trouble about! Sometimes like them, we find ourselves in trouble not because we’ve done something wrong BUT because we’ve done something right! The religious leaders felt threatened and so they brought Peter and John before them. They asked, *‘By what power or what name did you do this?’* (Acts 4:7) Peter replied, *‘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) Wow, what a powerful name it is, the name of Jesus! Be careful how you use this name, not as a swear word, or to express frustration, as we sometimes hear. Use the name of Jesus to bless others. Jesus tells us, *‘For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.’* (Matthew 18:20) and that when we pray *in his name,* our prayers will be answered (John 14:13-14 – we heard examples from Sarah last week about prayers being answered…from a lost glove found, to a sick child experiencing healing).

It’s a beautiful name, the name of Jesus; Peter tells his accusers, *‘Salvation is found in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.’* (Acts 4:12) Salvation isn’t a word we use much in everyday language but it carries the meaning of rescue, of forgiveness & of restoring what’s broken. In baptism it speaks of bringing people into a place where they are loved, forgiven, called and given purpose.

We read in Philippians 2:9 that Jesus was given *the name which is above every name* by His Father God, after he had lived, suffered, died and then been raised back to life. That’s why the name of Jesus has such meaning and power, because of what he did.

Stanley’s life is stretched out before him, we don’t know what he’ll go on to do, nor the places he’ll go, or the people he’ll meet. Is he a funny guy like Stan Laurel? Will he become a great footballer like Stanley Matthews? We don’t know, but we pray for him in the name of Jesus, that he and all his family will remember this day when he was baptised in the name of Jesus. May it remind all of you to pray for Stanley in the name of Jesus…Pray that Stanley may know so much blessing from God and find that his life becomes a blessing to so many others.

Jesus says to us, *’I have come that (you) may have life and have it to the full.’* (John 10:10) He loves us so much, willing to give everything for us…even laying down his life for us (John 10:14 & 17). I expect most of us have a mobile phone, lots of us are on social media apps like facebook, Instagram or Twitter where we can follow all sorts of people to see what they’re up to, what they think or what they are wearing. It all becomes a bit boring after a while! Why not follow someone who’s really worth following? Follow Jesus but not by scrolling on your phone, but by following him with the whole of your life…Decide to follow him today, he will never let you down! Amen.

Notices: Tuesday 27th April at 7.30pm, St James Annual Meeting will be held online on Zoom

If you would like a copy of the Annual Report please ask.

If you don't have the Zoom app, you can still join using a mobile or landline. Rachel has drawn up these simple instructions:

Call Zoom on one of the following numbers: 0208 080 6591 or 0208 080 6592 or 0330 088 5830 or 0131 460 1196

You’ll hear a welcome message. Enter the meeting ID followed by #
Meeting ID: 876 5476 0168

You’ll be asked to enter a participant ID if you have one – just enter #

You’ll be asked to enter a passcode followed by #
Passcode: 265440

NB Many phone tariffs come with anytime calls included up to an hour. So, after an hour, hang up and ring back again otherwise there will be a charge.

Sunday 2nd May 10.30 Holy Communion – ’Remain in Jesus & Bear Fruit’ (Acts 8:26-end & John15:1-8) (this will be Steve’s last service s Vicar at St James.)

From 3rd May -11th July, Steve will be on Sabbatical. During this period Sunday services will continue at 10.30am, often with a visiting clergy person leading Communion. Some weeks will be Services of the Word led by St James’ Readers (LLMs) and Lay worship Leaders….during this time we may have printed sermons to be able to deliver but not always!

\*Sunday 2nd May will be the last online service for the time-being. We will continue with Zoom Bible Mondays & Zoom Wednesday Night Prayers, but facebook Morning Prayer is due to stop after Friday 3oth April.