

had nothing to fear. Their God would redeem them. Hard for a people called "Captives" to believe, no doubt. Hard to imagine that their God still cared for a people who carried the name "Faithless." They weren't innocent victims of war, not by a long shot. They had rebelled against their God, chosen false ones to replace the One True God, and brought their society down to a heap of ruins. "I have summoned you BY NAME," Isaiah says for God. "You are mine. Come here, Faithless. You too, Lustful. You don't have to hide in the shadows, Liar. Come back to me. Don't worry about the hardship, or the threats, or the doubts. None of those things can hurt you."

It's comforting that when God calls us, God summons us by name. It means God knows us and loves us just the same. The weaknesses that have been fodder for other peoples' jokes become on God's lips terms of endearment. The sins that have brought about the judgment of fellow human beings bring out God's compassion. We don't have to trot out the pious, honourable names we sometimes hide behind to win God's favour. God knows us by name and couldn't love us more than God already does. That's good news, because it means the names that in the world's economy carry so much weight and possess such power, really mean nothing at all in God's realm.

Incredibly, God does more than just call us by name. That would be more than enough — to know that God knows the names we carry around like deadweight and knows why we carry them, yet loves us anyway. But God goes farther. God offers to change our names. God can erase "Addict" and replace it with "Recovering." God can remove "Discarded" and put in its place "Valued." God can take away "Sinner" and write "Righteous." God can change us from "Enslaved" to "Redeemed." (Isaiah 62:1-5)  
And that would certainly be enough.

And yet God goes further still. God calls us by God's name. God adopts us as part of God's family. God associates Godself with us. In Isaiah's prophecy, freedom and new life are "for everyone who is called by my name." You don't have to accept God's name, and many

don't. They go on living lives enslaved by the names the world gives them. But we don't want to make that mistake. To believers suffering because of their association with Jesus, Peter gives this advice: "Do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name." (1 Peter 4:16) Let the world call us whatever names it wants. We know the truth. Whether we are Anglican, Methodist, or United Reformed. We are Christians - Christ-people. We wear Christ's name. And all the promises of God are ours because of that.

The danger is that we forget. Like my niece Lori, we sometimes accept what the world tells us about who we are simply because we forget what name we wear. May I remind you? God wants to call you by God's name. God's Child came to us to do just that. The cross and empty tomb stand witness to your change of identity. Don't allow whatever names the world puts on you to ever mean more to you than the name of Jesus. If you do, you'll wallow in its mud holes and fill yourself with its junk food and forget completely what you've been made to be.

What's in a name? Everything, when that name is the name of Jesus.

Shalom - Salaam - Peace,

*Stephen Taylor*

**Each person as he or she  
is at rest is worthwhile -  
they don't become  
worthwhile by all they do  
when not at rest.  
It's from that point that  
God will move in them,  
create afresh, change.**

Rowan Williams,  
Silence and Honey Cakes