

“I have called you by name, you are Mine”

Tuesday 21 October 2003

1 Samuel 3.1-18, John 10.1-5 - Midrash on Isaiah 43.1

Today I'm going to do something I've not done before. I'm going to speak standing on one leg. Well, maybe not. Instead I thought we'd do some Midrash. Midrash is an ancient Jewish way of interpreting the Bible, taking a verse or a passage and saying what it might mean by using another part of the Bible directly, or simply by alluding to another part of the Bible. The verse I want to look at is Isaiah 43.1, “I have called you by name, you are Mine”.

One of the areas of Old Testament study that fascinates me most is that of names. It is usually assumed that someone's name in the Old Testament tells you something about that person, like Jacob meaning ‘deceiver’. However, on closer inspection of Genesis, we can see that actually names usually have more to do with a person's birth, rather than their life.

So Abraham's son is named Isaac because Sarah laughed when she was told she would have him. What this means is that God calls us by name, from birth. He doesn't call us once, or twice if we are especially holy, he calls us all the time, from birth to death. There is never a moment in our life when we are not being called by God: he calls every one of us, every moment of our life.

Now I'd like you to image yourselves at a dinner party, or a church coffee morning, or a chapel lunch for freshers. There is a general hubbub of noise, and then someone close by suddenly says your name. You look up at that person, and realise that they were talking about someone else, or in my case, they'd simply said "then". We can pick out our name amidst all the noise of the people talking around us. For this reason God uses our names. Through all the noise of our day to day lives, God speaks our name to us softly, close by, and we hear our name. We know we are being called, but by whom?

Like Samuel, we cannot recognise God's voice until he

reveals himself to us. But once we belong to him, we become like the sheep in Jesus' parable. We hear God calling us, and we recognise his voice. And what do the sheep do in Jesus' parable, after they have heard the call? They go to the shepherd and he leads them out. They respond to his call by going to him. Do they respond once, or twice if they are feeling especially holy? No - every time the shepherd calls them, they go. Every time they hear his voice, they move towards him, knowing who it is that is calling them. Every time. And because God calls us all the time, from birth until death, so we must move towards him *all the time*. He is always calling us as he called Samuel, "Samuel, Samuel!" We must live our lives in answer to that call, saying, "Yes, Lord, I *will follow* you," for we are his, and his alone.

"I have called you by name, you are Mine."

Lord God, help us to hear your call and live our lives responding to it, that we might help others hear your voice, and come closer and closer to you every day. Amen.