

Listening for the Promise

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL

Second Sunday in Lent — February 25, 2024

*No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham,
for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.*

– Genesis 17:5 –

Shakespeare wrote “A rose by any other name would smell as sweet,” and yet parents put a great deal of thought and research into the names of their children. They buy books that describe the history and meaning of names. They look for names that will guarantee the success of their children. They use names to honor the past or to make a statement about the present. After all that work, parents often call their children by nicknames. Some parents choose names that are so outlandish that their children have their names legally changed as soon as possible. Perhaps Shakespeare was right: What’s in a name?

Names mean something to God, and it is obvious in the stories of the biblical characters, especially when God changes their names. Jacob became Israel. Simon became Peter. Saul became Paul. These name changes identify a change in the relationship between God and the person. Their names reveal to us the plan God has for their life.

Abram and his wife Sarai had trusted in God’s promise for nearly twenty-five years but they were getting old. In today’s Old Testament lesson, God renewed the promise and tied it to the covenant of circumcision. He changed Abram’s name to Abraham: he was once called “exalted father,” but in this new covenant he would be “the father of many nations.” This was a turning point in the relationship between God and Abraham. It was also a turning point for Sarai, whose name was changed to Sarah. God said, “I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.” God named them according to the calling in their lives.

A wise woman once said, “Know your calling better than your own name. Your Mama and Daddy gave you your name, but your calling is what God has named you. It is written on your heart and is the name that matters.” While many parents put a great deal of thought and research into the names of their children, those names are less important than the name given to us by God; it is there we will find God’s plan for our life.

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