

Call me Peter

After hearing Ruth Atkinson talking about being Ruth I began to begin thinking about my own name.

Some years ago I asked my mother why I had been given two Christian names: Peter and John. She replied that it was to distinguish me from the other people called Peter Hemmings. About forty years later I did actually meet one and he was another chess player.

When I met my wife Noreen it was on holiday with my parents. My father told us that he had an aunt living in the same village. So on the Friday morning my two sisters and I went to meet great-aunt Ruth. When I was introduced the lady said, "Oh, I remember Peter Hemmings". He was her brother. She got up and went to the sideboard and came back with a photograph. I was shown a picture of a white tombstone with my name on it. Several years later I discovered that he had died in the same hospital where I had my appendix out as a teenager. He died of peritonitis so it was a good job that my mother never knew that!

In some ways I find it very easy to identify with Simon Peter. But then, who doesn't? He says to Jesus, "Depart from me because I am a sinful man." Peter had not believed when Jesus told him to cast the net on the other side. Peter had fallen asleep when Jesus asked him to watch and pray. Worse still when Peter claimed he would always stand by Jesus, he denied ever knowing him. How many times have I kept quiet when I should have spoken? On another occasion Peter floundered. Say no more!

Peter shared the mountain top experience when he saw Jesus in glory with the great men of faith. It was Peter who said, "Master it is good for us to be here." It was Simon Peter who recognised that Jesus was the Christ, the son of the living God. But when Peter tried to deny the cross, "Get thee behind me Satan." In each Covenant Service we have to confess that we have been afraid to bear the cross.

And yet it was to this man who hit the spiritual heights and depths that Jesus says he is the rock upon which the church is to be built. My favourite story is when Jesus asks Peter, "Do you love me?" Three times "You know that I love you". The wound of denial has been completely healed.

Peter is the hero of the early Acts of the Apostles and has the vision that all nations can come to Jesus. In later life he urges us to love one another fervently (the AV word is stronger than NIV's deeply). Peter had learned from Jesus that whatever experiences he went through he was loved by God. And so do I. But you do not have to be called Peter to know that.