

“Jesse Scott Perkins”

- That’s the full name listed on my birth certificate
 - Scott being the name of my great grandfather on my dad’s side
 - No idea where Jesse came from, but I certainly prefer it to the name my mom would have given me had I been born female... which was Candy
 - No offense to anyone named Candy
 - And as you yourself may have experienced growing up
 - The middle name seems to only come out when there is mischief being made
 - I saw a meme just the other day that said, “The sole purpose of a child’s middle name is so they can tell when they are really in trouble.”
 - When I get a little wound up, I might refer to my wife by her entire maiden name, “Kathryn Ann Hohrine!”
 - I am also fondly remembering a scene from the old Austin Powers movies... where he says, “Danger is my middle name!”
 - Now all of this lightheartedness is here because frankly I needed it a bit this week
 - Because this week, and the last week, and the last 10 months... or has it been 10 years, I’m not sure anymore
 - Has been tough. On all of us. On our world, on our country, own our family, on our church, and on us individually.
 - Yet in the midst of it all, which can be very overwhelming and distracting and consuming
 - In the midst of it all I believe God is there calling us back, by full name, and reminding us of who we are
 - Who we are created to be. What our God given name is, the one God had in mind for us when God started creating the whole universe
 - And then knew it was time for us, knitted us together in the womb, for this moment.
 - God is calling us by name, and God is using our full names too
 - And I am simply moved by our Presiding Bishop, The Rt. Rev. Michael Bruce Curry, and his sermon this week

- That he asked our church and our country, “Who shall we be?”¹
- What is our name that God has given us, and that we should hear and live into?
- Because I do think God is calling us by our full names right now.
- As we turn our eye to Scripture first, today’s lessons are simply amazing as we consider the aspects of God calling our names.
 - I mean, check it out! We have God calling to Samuel by name to be a prophet in our Old Testament reading
 - We have Jesus calling Phillip to be a disciple in our Gospel
 - As Jesus begins to call his disciples in our Gospel, and when we pick up he has Andrew and Simon Peter already with him
 - He calls out to Philip and says “Follow me”.
 - Philip finds Nathaniel and as Nathaniel approaches, Jesus already recognizes him, and knows about him
 - Knows exactly who is is and what God is going to do through this man’s faith and life
 - Jesus, it seems, has seen Nathaniel resting under the fig tree, yet already knows what God has in store for him, already knows his name
 - For each of these four disciples, they hear or see Jesus briefly, and begin to follow
 - They do not know where Jesus is going, or what Jesus is leading them to, but they follow in faith that God has something in store for them
 - They have heard it. Heard their names whispered if not out loud then by the Spirit
 - And are beginning to live into the life God has planned.
- And Samuel- just a kid dedicated to God’s service in the temple
 - He hears God’s call so vividly he mistakes it for the elderly priest, Eli
 - And after a couple of times, finally answers God, “Here I am. Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”
 - Again, unsure of what God had in store, only that this calling was something special, something they could not ignore
 - Another full name kind of moment.
 - Now what we don’t often hear about Samuel and Eli is this: the calling of Samuel was no small matter for the entire nation of Israel²

¹ <https://episcopalchurch.org/posts/publicaffairs/presiding-bishop-currys-word-church-who-shall-we-be>

² Cory Driver, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/second-sunday-after-epiphany-2/commentary-on-1-samuel-31-10-11-20-6>

- The setting for this passage is that the word of the Lord was rare in these days, and that “visions were not widespread”
- It is a way to describing a spiritual doubt time, when the people and their leaders have wandered from God
- As we read and learn more, Eli, the current priest in power, was not a very good or faithful priest
- Instead of hearing and preaching God’s prophetic word, Eli was said to have dull senses...
 - That’s likely a spiritual commentary and less of a physical one, commenting on his lack of spiritual discernment
- His son’s were worse: Scripture actually calls them “scoundrels”. (1 Samuel 2:12)
- They stole the best sacrifices for themselves, they threatened worshipers with violence,
 - And they abused the women at the entrance of the tent of meeting.
- God steps in and calls Samuel- transfers the prophetic mantle away from Eli and his heirs
- Raises up Samuel to follow in God’s ways of justice, mercy, love, and humbly serving God
- And to lead his country likewise
- As you no doubt are aware, tomorrow is The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s day, a holiday set aside to honor a man who heard God call him
 - And who then called our nation to be more like what God wants us to be
 - I am proud of St. Michael’s this year: not only are also honoring Dr King in our service today
 - But because this year it is more than the prayers and songs on a Sunday morning
 - This year, we are in the middle of our Anti-racism Journey towards awareness where each month we read or watch a book or movie
 - And then discuss it in a group that has been well attended by people far outside of our parish
 - You should join- we are moving it to the fourth Wednesday of the month starting this month.
- We partnered with the Community Church of Barrington and their pastor Rev. Zina Jacque, to create a space where we can learn, dialogue,
 - And through our own increases in self-awareness better answer God’s call in our lives to be people who seek after justice and equality

- Mtr. Lisa will be a part of a prayer service tomorrow evening live streamed, calling us to Confession and Repentance
 - More info on the church website if you're interested
- In such spirit, I took the time this week to listen to the reading of the Letter from a Birmingham Jail again
- I was moved again by his eloquence, as I am sure you are too when you read or listen to The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
- And about his very clear and firm belief that the fight for justice and equality and anti-racism that is both individual and collective,
 - Is inherently and inescapable God's work- A Christian's work
 - And that God calls us to be co-workers with God
 - Co-workers in the non-violent but unrelenting walk towards the love and justice God asks us of and Jesus taught through words and example
 - His words around the embrace of non-violence as means for changes are beautiful, condemning all violence when used as a means to an end
 - And that while progress has been made, there is still so much work to be done
 - Until we can realize the dream that he once had
- Like you, I look around today and I witness so many places where this work is still needed
 - On my pessimistic days, I think there are more places now than there were 5 years ago, but perhaps I am just more aware now.
 - I have been stunned at the images on the news this month:
 - This past week we have seen the Confederate flags taken into the Capital,
 - Nazi symbols displayed at the symbolic center of freedom and democracy³
 - Symbols that represent ideals in contrast to not only our nation's founding, but the Kingdom of God,
 - In contrast to the way of love that Jesus taught and that we profess to follow using the words of our Baptismal Covenant
 - Symbols that represent slavery, racism, hate and fascism
 - And while we must, without reservation, love the child of God waiving those flags
 - We can with fervor denounce what they stand for as antithetical to the Gospel of Jesus Christ

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/06/briefing/pro-trump-mob-storms-the-capitol.html>

- God is calling us to so much more- we have been given names greater than this, a calling into something better, something holier
- I imagine God giving us middle names like Peace, Forgiveness, Grace, Love, Patience, Committed, and Righteousness
- And calling us by name to this work to insist on nothing less.
- Bishop Curry, in his sermon, posted the question, “Who will we be?”
- He suggests that each moment like this of great tension and conflict, we have the opportunity to answer that question in ways that move us closer to God, and to God’s beloved community
- Or answer it in ways that move us away, and closer to chaos
- To answer it with love- sacrificial and persistent love- of others, of justice, of mercy
- Or to answer it with coldness and indifference towards the others who suffer in our midst
- Like Jesus calling out to the disciples, God calling out to Samuel
- I believe God is calling you and me by name- maybe even using our full names in an attempt to get our attention
- Calling us by name to be the people God wants, needs, and created us to be
- So let me leave you with a quote from our Presiding Bishop, because he gets it so right and says it so well
 - I’ll put a link to the full sermon in the blog
- Quoting Lincoln, a President who also led this country during great times of division, the bishop concludes like this:

“This is the way of love that can heal our hurts, that can heal our land, that can help us to become one nation under God, indivisible with liberty and justice for all. So, I would ask you to do two things. I’m asking you to make a commitment, a renewed commitment, to live the way of love as Jesus has taught us and to do it by making a commitment to go out and bless somebody.

Bless somebody you disagree with. Bless somebody you agree with. But to go out and bless somebody by helping somebody along the way. Go out and bless somebody by listening to their story and their life. To go out and be an instrument of God's peace, an agent of God's love.

And then I would ask you to pray. Pray for this nation but pray with some specificity. Pray that we may have the wisdom and the courage to love.

With malice toward none, with charity toward all. With firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right. Let us strive to finish the work, the work that we are in. To bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan. To do all which may achieve and cherish, a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.

God love you. God bless you. And may God hold us all in those almighty hands of love.”⁴

Amen.

⁴ <https://episcopalchurch.org/posts/publicaffairs/presiding-bishop-currys-word-church-who-shall-we-be>