

“The God who names us”

- Many of you already know this about me, but I am a pet lover
  - Mostly dogs, there were some cats in there too, an aloe vera plant, and even one opossum
  - It is always a joy when you first bring home that pet, or hold that newborn puppy
  - To name them
  - Let’s see: I’ve had a Blacky - that was the cat
  - Tippy, he had a white tip on his tail
  - I think there was a Buster in there
  - The opossum was named Doughnut, because my younger brought thought he looked like a donut when he curled up to sleep
  - Molly and Beans
  - Rosie, who you all did not get to know, but was the best dog in the world
    - And who got her name because we felt that Nosey Rosie was too obvious, so we settled on Rose Marie, and Rosie for short
  - The aloe vera plant was named Spanky. There was no good reason for that.
  - And now Sally, for whom the verdict is still out.
  - 
  - Now naming a person, a child, that’s a whole different ballgame
  - Because we know names are important- kids grow into their names, or rebel against them, or even chose to change them
  - I remember when Gaius first figured out we all had the same last name
    - He said, Jesse Perkins, Katy Perkins, Gaius Perkins- Hey, we are all Perkinses
  - Names are important
  - They offer a concise way of speaking of someone when they are infinitely more complex than can ever be spoken
  - We are questioned, summoned, instructed, insulted and complimented all by our name.

- It becomes a linguistic placeholder for who we: our past and our potential
- The Prophet Isaiah says, The Lord, who created you, he who formed you, Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name.
  - You are mine.
- This Sunday, today, is a pretty big day on our liturgical calendar
  - Today we celebrate the Baptism of our Lord, who only three weeks ago was born
    - (They grow up so fast)
  - And while Jesus' name was already set, it was at this point that he took up the mantle that God had for him
  - Here he began his early ministry, and in a way his name went from just Jesus, son of Mary and Joseph
    - To Jesus Christ, Messiah, Emmanuel
  - This starts with the gospel from Luke this morning
  - But in fact, all four of the gospels share this story in common<sup>1</sup>
  - John the Baptizer baptizes Jesus in the river Jordan, and the Spirit descends upon him like a dove
  - In all but John, there is a voice from heaven speaking and naming Jesus to be the Son of God, the Beloved
  - One author points out that we have water, wind, and fire in this account- all of the holy symbols coming together
    - You know something important is about to happen<sup>2</sup>
  - We also have here one of the Scriptural foundations for our view of God as a Trinity
  - It is in these accounts we have God present as Father by voice, Son in the flesh, and the Spirit as a dove.
  - And it all comes together to emphasize what is about to happen
  - Jesus begins a new life here, reborn of water and spirit and calling
  - Now I do wonder sometimes what it was like for the 30 or so years before the moment in Jesus' life
  - What was it like for him to be fully human and yet fully divine- what would puberty have been like for someone like that??
  - Scripture is woefully short on that piece of Jesus' life, excluding that one time he gets lost in the temple

---

<sup>1</sup> Orville E. Daniel, *A Harmony of the Four Gospels*, pp 31-34

<sup>2</sup> Sermon Seeds Loc 884/5728

- But if you are up for a fun, completely sacrilegious read on Jesus' early life, go find the book called Lamb: The Gospel according Biff, Jesus' childhood pal.
- But today is without a doubt that at this point his official ministry on earth begins
- Here God calls his name, so to speak, renames him in a way with a purpose
- And he responds by beginning his long journey that will take him through water of the Jordan
- And into the heart of Jerusalem, not counting the cost
- God names Jesus his beloved, and calls him to his true nature and purpose
- Our baptisms are no different
  - They are the point in which we begin again in a new life of listening to and following God's call
  - At our Baptism, we receive an indelible, or permanent mark, on our souls, marked as God's own forever
  - And indeed, God has been doing it for a long time, even back when Isaiah was writing to the people of Israel
  - God calls them by name to be the people God intends for them to be, the people formed by a covenant with this loving, creator God
  - Notice how that it is through the waters, through the rivers, and through the fire- through all of the difficulties, hardships, the grief, and the joy
  - God promises to go with them and promises them a way through.
  - Being named and called by God is the beginning of a new identity- for Israel, for Jesus, and for us as well
  - So much so, that at one point in the church's history, and in particular our church's history in the Elizabethan area<sup>3</sup>
  - Before birth certificates were at a courthouse nearby
  - Newborn's were legally named at their baptism service
  - I also discovered on Wikipedia<sup>4</sup> that, around the time of St. John Chrysostom, Christian parents would select several potential names for their new child
  - They would associate the names each with a lamp, light the lamps, and whichever burned longest, that would be the name!

---

<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian\\_name](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_name)

<sup>4</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian\\_name](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_name)

- They believed it would bring long life.
- To be Baptized, like Jesus, and to be in covenant like Israel, is to start a faithful journey listening to the divine calling of our name
- And trying to live into the divine potential God has given us.
- Adopted into God's family as children, and embraced by God's family here on earth in the church
- As we begin this new year, and as I was considering my first sermon of 2019
  - I wish to simply invite us all to listen, and to hear God naming and calling us
  - Like we might when we first name a child, or a pet, or when we fall in love and whisper their names
  - Or perhaps God is renaming us, asking us to let go of some things that have held us back, kept us from loving and being loved
  - This voice, God's voice, is not a judging one, it doesn't have a disapproving tone
  - Instead God is calling out to each of us with the utmost affection and care- imagine God smiling as he calls into the fold
  - God calls us knowing everything about us, knowing what our faults are, and what we have failed to do
  - And still calls, just as God did at our baptisms, and each day of our lives
  - This year, after we have said goodbye to a bumpy 2018 and are looking forward to a new 2019
  - God is speaking our name, with love, and understanding, and comfort... understanding us better than anyone else can ever do
  - Calling us first to simply be in God's presence, to become a renewed child of God living in God's kingdom
  - To take on an additional surname of Christian, or "little Christ"
  - And then we can get to work bringing about God's kingdom in our little corner of the world
  - Out of sheer thanksgiving for being loved for simply who we are, without the masks, and without doing anything to earn it
  - And we can do it without fear
  - It's God's message to the people of Israel through Isaiah, God's message to Mary and Joseph just a few weeks back
  - I believe it was God's word to Jesus as he was baptized and began his journey
  - And it is our message.

- That wherever we go, wherever the year takes us, we do not have to fear
- God goes with us, before us, and behind, and God knows our names, knows who we are, and knows what potential we have
- God is calling us, naming us, perhaps offering to rename us as a way to transform and change our lives into the purpose God has for us
- What is it that God is calling us to be?
- What is God calling us to let go of this year?
- Begin this new year along with Jesus, and with ancient Israel, hearing God speaking ever more our names
- Calling us away from the noise of hate, judgment, scapegoating, and outrage
- And into ever more tenderness, compassion, resilience, and love for each other and for all of humankind
- Hear God calling you and me more completely into who God wants us to be.

Amen.