

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Lena, IL – 22 January 2023**  
**Third Sunday after Epiphany - Year A – Lectionary 3**

**1st Reading: *Isaiah 9:1-4***

**Psalm: *27:1, 5-12***

**2nd Reading: *I Corinthians 1:10-18***

**Gospel: *Matthew 4:12-23***

**Sermon - *Vicar Thomas J. Mosbø***

In the name of the Father, ☩ and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

What is Montague? It is nor hand, nor foot,  
Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part  
Belonging to a man. O, be some other name!  
What's in a name? That which we call a rose,  
By any other name would smell as sweet;  
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd,  
retain that dear perfection which he owes  
Without that title: Romeo, doff thy name;  
And for that name, which is no part of thee,  
Take all myself.

What do you think? Is Juliet correct? Are names really meaningless? Are they no part of us at all? Does it matter that in English we call the flower a “rose”, but in Greek it is called “τριαντάφυλλο”? Here, I’ve brought you a dozen τριαντάφυλλο! Don’t they smell sweet? And, of course, they do.

But unfortunately, Romeo and Juliet are caught up in a family feud, and their names identify them either as friend or as foe, and they are powerless to make peace, that is until they die and their love for each other is revealed, and so the two families are shamed into making peace with each other.

So what do we as Christians think about names? Remember a couple of weeks ago, we heard Paul’s hymn to Jesus, in which he wrote that God had exalted Jesus and given him the name above all names, so that in the name of Jesus all souls in heaven and earth would bow to him.

And what about the 10 Commandments: “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.” Indeed, this translation of this commandment is itself an attempt to respect the name of God. For what the Hebrew really says is “You shall not take the name of Yahweh your God in vain”. Yahweh is the name of God that in most of our Old Testaments is written as the title “LORD” in all capitals.

It seems that around 2,500 years ago, the Jewish people decided that out of respect, in order to keep from defiling the name of God, they would never speak it again, but would always use the title “Lord” in place of the holy name Yahweh. And we as Christians have continued this custom for the most part, although in a few translations of the Old Testament, such as the Jerusalem Bible, you will see the name Yahweh.

So according to the Bible, names are very very significant. Remember in the beginning of Genesis we read that “out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field.”

And at the other end of the Bible, in Revelation [2:17], Jesus says to John to “hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.”

So what’s in a name? According to the Bible, a great deal. To know someone’s true name is to have power over that person. It is to possess the true essence of that person.

On the 1st of January we celebrated the festival of the Name of Jesus. We got a little side-tracked that day by “Amazing Grace”, so I wanted to tie in the importance of that festival with our readings this week. The angel Gabriel had instructed Mary to name her son Jesus, which means “the Saviour”, and of course that is the true essence of who Jesus is - the Saviour. This means that God himself named Jesus - Mary and Joseph simply obeyed what they were told to do.

And in the Gospel reading from last week, from “The Confession of Saint Peter” this past Wednesday, and from today’s Gospel, we hear how Jesus gave his disciple Simon a new name: Peter - Cephas in Hebrew or Aramaic, and in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians this morning we hear Paul refer to him as Cephas. The name Cephas in Hebrew and Peter in Greek means the Rock - we might call him “Rocky” as a quaint English version of this name.

Jesus indicates to us that this is Simon's true name - Peter, the Rock - the name given him by God [just as Jacob was given the name Israel some 2,000 years earlier, showing us again how important names really are].

So I want us to contemplate that verse I read from Revelation. Jesus tells us that "To the one who conquers I will give... a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it." God has a secret, true name for each one of us. God knows each one of us better than we know ourselves, and he calls us by that true name.

It's a bit of a scary thought - what does God really think of me? What is my true name in God's eyes? But fear not! It is not a threatening message that God brings us, but one of comfort, of joy, of hope. God loves us, enough to die for us. He gives us our true name, our true identity, our true essence, and as he did to Peter, he calls us to come follow him. His yoke is easy and his burden is light, and he waits for us to respond to his calling us by our true names.

Amen!

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