

Bible Study
Feast of the Holy Name, Year A
January 1, 2017

[RCL] Number 6:22-27; Psalm 8; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:15-21

Numbers 6:22-27

There is something holy about the giving and receiving of names. The acts of naming and being named are sacred practices in the Judeo-Christian faith. When we are born, our parents or our guardians give us our first names and share with us their last name. We give affectionate nicknames to those we love and share our lives with. When we are joined together with another in marriage, a common practice is the sharing or joining together of last names between partners. Our names give us identity and reveal us as persons who are known and joined together with our families and community.

How remarkable then is this instance of the Lord sharing a name with the people of Israel? In this act, Israel is given an identity—one of being joined together with the Lord who is capable of blessing them, keeping them and granting them peace, even in the midst of their incompleteness and in their becoming.

Today, this same blessing is available to us. We too can share in this name with the one who desires to bless us, keep us and ultimately, grant us peace.

- What names have you been given by those who love you?
- What names have you given to others who you love?
- How has being given a name by another changed or added to your relationship with them?
- Are there any special names you associate with God?

Psalm 8

Names give distinction to our identity. In Psalm 8, we find the Lord described as “our Governor” and the one whose name is exalted “in all the world!” Further the Lord is described as one who is able to overcome our strongest of adversaries and who’s fingers shaped the moon and stars, setting them on their course. In comparison, the author of Psalm 8 names humanity as “man” and describes us as “a little lower than the angels” and wonders, “What is man that [God] should be mindful of [us]?”

Our identity is distinct from the identity of the Lord. The Lord’s name is representative of unbounded divine power that is capable of shaping the universe around us, and our name points toward our limitedness and our ultimate need for the Lord.

Yet in this passage, we are also reminded that the Lord, who is our governor, has trusted us, in our limitedness, with the works of the divine’s hand. How humbling and how wondrous it is to share in relationship with the Lord who holds all power, yet trusts us with the responsibility of overseeing and protecting the creation.

- It has been said that difference makes relationship possible. What difference/distinction do you see between you and God?
- What has the Lord trusted you with overseeing and protecting?
- How would you describe the identity you have been given by God and in what ways is it unique?

Galatians 4:4-7

Titles, a kind of name, give nuance to our identities and reveal how we are related to one another. This passage from Galatians illuminates a change in title that drastically changes our relationship to God. The author states that we were once “slaves” but now have been “adopted” and are called God’s children and heirs.

The language of slave maybe it difficult for many of us to relate to, but perhaps we can use the word employee to gain insight to how this change has impacted us? Neither slaves nor employees of a manager are loved by their manager in the way that a parent loves their child. Further, it would be unusual for a slave or employee to be the beneficiary or heir of the wealth of a manager. A child of a parent, however, is loved and also heir to all the good things of their parent.

In this light, when we consider this change in title—from slave to child and heir—we can rejoice in this good news of who we have become in relationship to our divine parent.

- What titles do you currently hold and what do they tell others about who you are?
- Have you ever had a change in title that drastically effected the way that you were able to relate to others?
- When you consider that God has called you child and heir to kingdom of God, does it change the way you think about how you relate to God on a daily basis?

Luke 2:15-21

In our gospel passage, we learn that Jesus was given his name even before being conceived in his mother’s womb. Likewise, the shepherds who had come to see him told Mary that even before Jesus had been born that they have been visited by angels who told them that he would be the messiah.

This story begs the question, when is it that we truly become who we have been created to be?

Frederick Buechner describes our divine calling as “the place where [our] deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” Surely Jesus found this to be true of his calling in the world and perhaps as we mediate on this idea, we too might discover some new calling or possibly even revitalize one that we have known but have allowed to lay dormant for too long.

- What do you believe your calling is in the world?
- What deep needs of the world are clearly visible to you?
- What talent or skills do you posses that bring you great joy and gladness?
- Where do your answers to the first two questions intersect and how does it inform what you believe your calling to be?

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