

Worship: January 16, 2022-01-16

On-Line only

Thought for Meditation:

Proper names are poetry in the raw. Like all poetry they are untranslatable.

W. H. Auden

Welcome & Lighting of the Christ Candle

Opening Prayer:

Leader: As we welcome one another into this time together, O God, we welcome you and the wild presence of your Spirit.

People: **We gather in your light, comforted by the warmth it provides; readying for what it might reveal.**

Leader: Named and claimed as your own, we now offer up the words that Jesus taught his friends to pray together, saying

Our Father who art in heaven,

Hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come,

Thy will be done,

On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread,

And forgive us our trespasses,

As we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation,

But deliver us from evil,

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,

For ever and ever. Amen.

Scripture: Isaiah 62: 1-5

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch. The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will bestow. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called Hephzibah: My Delight Is in Her, and your land Beulah, meaning Covenanted; for the Lord delights in you.

Sermon:

This past week, Hailey Morrison found her Memory box. Hailey is six and a half years old, the daughter of Mark and Christine Morrison and the granddaughter of Sue and Paul Morrison. And a remarkable person in her own right. Hailey's memory box holds some of her very special belongings. Not the everyday sort of belongings. The special things. Even if they appear ordinary to the casual observer. And the casual observer would of course be wrong about that. For memory boxes are never ordinary. And the items always hold a story.

One of the items Hailey discovered was her baptismal candle...and she asked Mimi (that's what she calls her Grandmother) what it was. Sue explained to Hailey about Baptism.

Later Hailey was telling her mother about finding her baptismal candle, and explained it all this way: *You go to church and get water put on you and then the boss of the church tells God what your name is. The end.*

That is a pretty fantastic description of the sacrament.

Mostly I love that Hailey is telling the story as she took it in. The funniest part is that I am called the boss of the church. Now, before you all write in to me, of course I can hear you already: *You are so not the boss of me, Kelly!*

No. No I am not. In fact, as clergy, I am named as servant of Christ and of this church, which is to say, all of you. So, not the boss.

But stories always change with the telling, and with the teller. And who knows better about the sense of a boss, someone who directs us, benignly or otherwise, who knows perhaps innately about power -who has it, and who doesn't - than a child?

And I love the way Hailey holds power as she becomes the teller of the story, of her story of baptism. Hailey assigns me a descriptor (boss), but it is Hailey who assigns the job, and the importance of it: the power of naming; of being named. Telling her name to God. Tossing it up to the Holy. That was the deep heart of her story of baptism, for me anyway.

To hear your name spoken aloud. It can be so beautiful, can't it? To hear your name on the lips of someone who loves you, whom you love, I think that is as close to God as we may know in this life.

The act of naming, of naming people, places and events recurs throughout the Bible. And it always signifies their essence. On the very first pages of Genesis we have the story of Adam being given the task of naming the animals. Recall how God has spoken each creature into being. God *says*, "Let there be ...birds of the air, crawling creatures, sea beings..." And then comes Adam, *Adamah*, this creature of the earth, of dust, (the name means earth in Hebrew) who calls back to God a name for each one: Sparrow, beetle, Orca! It presents us with this gorgeous sort of call and response betwixt human and the divine, between heaven and earth.

All through our stories, this act and art of naming features prominently. Jacob gives the place where he wrestled with God a special name, Peniel, "because I saw God face to face, and yet I lived."

Children in our scriptural stories often receive symbolic names, like Ichabod, the grandson of Eli, who was a priest in Shiloh. Eli has 2 wayward sons, Phineas and Hophni. They go into battle against the Philistines, and both are killed. And in a crushing blow to the Israelites, in this battle the Ark of the Covenant is captured and taken away by the Philistines. When news of this is received, old Eli falls backwards off his chair breaking his neck and dies. Phineas' wife goes into labour and hearing all that has unfolded, she names the child Ichabod which means "the glory has departed."

(may well be why that name does not make the Most Popular Baby Names)

In a happier story Sarah and Abraham's son is named Isaac, meaning laughter, to mark that when God told Abram that he and Sarai would have a child despite them both being very old, Sarai, overhears and laughs out loud. In fact after this both Abram and Sarai receive new names too, as Abraham and Sarah.

This re-naming carries even greater significance. A new name signifies a significant change, a new way forward, a new reality.

So, we have Joseph, the favoured son named by his parents Rachel and Jacob, and he is renamed by Pharaoh: Zaphenath-paneah, meaning "he who reveals mystery."

Jesus changed Simon's name to Peter.

A story in Acts tells us that after being blinded by the light in an encounter with the resurrected Christ, Saul assumes a new name - his Roman name, a symbol that he will be reaching out beyond his Jewish borders to the Gentiles - And it is Paul: meaning humble.

Women joining a religious order often will change their name to that of a saint, although it is not always required anymore, but as a sign of a new direction in life. Monks, likewise, also popes.

An Orthodox Jew who has become ill to the point of near death may have a name added, a name that indicates healing or long life: *Chaim* or *Yocheved*.

And those who are transitioning, finding their way forward in a changing body, a changing spirit may choose a name to reflect their new reality. Or perhaps to call it into being with the holy.

Here, quite near the beginning of this new year, the Old Testament reading from Isaiah 62 promises us *all* a new name, and with it the possibility of a new reality.

You will be called by a new name

that the mouth of the Lord will bestow.

3 You will be a crown of splendor in the Lord's hand,
a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

4 No longer will they call you Deserted,
or name your land Desolate.

But you will be called Hephzibah,
and your land Beulah;

for the Lord will take delight in you,
and your land will be married.

Your God rejoices over you.

This beautiful passage is Isaiah affirming to the people their importance to God. And this was a people, now out of exile, but still feeling in bondage in some ways. For Jerusalem is no longer the beautiful place, no longer a place tended and loved. Still missing was their holy place, the symbols of their faith. They felt alone and abandoned by God. Imagine then to be told, "Oh no, my people," as Isaiah does,

speaking to the people and I somehow think also to God, “You have a new name: Hephzibah: God’s Delight. And your beloved land is called Beulah: a place covenanted with the Holy, married to the holy.

Many of the biblical versions leave out the Hebrew names (Hephzibah and Beulah), so I intentionally chose a version that does. Because it speaks to the beauty and importance of the names the people use and choose, and how they connect to the holy. A name spoken aloud, and God’s role in naming as well.

It reminds me so very much of our act of Baptism. Seldom is there much emphasis placed on the name of the child in our sacrament it seems. Perhaps because the child may have already had their name for some time before baptism. The sacrament focuses on the child being named as God’s beloved. Which is wonderful. And draws us into community with the one being baptized.

But Hailey’s story reminded me of the power and sacredness of our names given to us. Little wonder. After all, the name Hailey has couple of meanings. In the Scottish tradition it means ‘of a hay meadow’: images of golden hay and sunlight a green meadow in summer. But in Irish, Hailey means ‘wisdom.’ And she brought a lot of wisdom to this story today.

At her Baptism when I asked “What name shall we call this child?” Mark and Christine answered Hailey Lee Morrison. And then I baptized her in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, One God, Mother and Father of us all. But now I like to see it as Hailey does. That I told God: “Here is Hailey Lee Morrison, God.” And God, well God responded back, saying “Hello Hailey! I call you a crown, a diamond in my hand, my Beloved, in you I take delight!”

Every naming or renaming reveals the intimacy and connection of the human and the divine. It let a bereft people go forward from exile and live anew. As our stories reveal, it let all sorts of new life emerge. May Isaiah’s words, and your reflection on your own name given, or taken on, may it give you strength anew for the journey ahead. So straighten that crown upon your heads my friends, for you are splendor to God, God’s true delight. Amen

ANNOUNCEMENTS

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

Sometimes, we believe the gifts we offer do not matter. But when they are combined with all the other gifts – of healing, of hope, of compassion, of your heart – they can become rivers of grace and justice flowing through the lives of everyone around us. We give thanks for all the gifts you bring and we offer them in Jesus' name. Amen.

PRAYERS OF PEOPLE

BENEDICTION