

Called By Name

November 3, 2013 – Remembrance Sunday

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(note: the song referred to can be found online at <http://youtu.be/KDi4hBWsvkY>)

Earlier this fall, a song zoomed to the top of the charts here in the U.S. The song's title was Oh Sweet Lorraine. It was a pretty unlikely hit. It was written -- this summer -- by a 96 year old man named Fred Stobaugh, who is not a songwriter but who is a man who adored his wife. His 'sweet Lorraine.' "*Oh Sweet Lorraine*" made it into the top 5 on iTunes, which means that for a while in there, folks were downloading this song more than songs by the likes of Justin Timberlake, and Miley Cyrus.

Here's how this surprise hit was born. Earlier this summer, Fred had seen an advertisement in his local paper, in Peoria, inviting people to submit entries for a songwriting contest hosted by a local recording studio. The entries were supposed to be recorded digitally, uploaded to YouTube, and sent electronically- - but Fred didn't know anything about all that .All he knew was that he wanted to write a song for his wife of 73 years, Lorraine. His Lorraine, who had just died in April. And Fred just wanted to express his grief, his longing, his love. So he took a sheet of paper and a pen, and he wrote the word to a song. *Oh sweet Lorraine*, he wrote, *I wish we could do the good times all over again. Oh sweet Lorraine, the memories will always linger on. Oh sweet Lorraine. That's why I write you this song.*

And when Fred had finished writing, he got a manila envelope, sealed up his song and sent it to the studio. At the studio, the owner, a young musician named Jacob, was a little puzzled to receive a large envelope with the address in shaky handwriting. He opened it, and there was Fred's song, along with a letter from Fred, explaining that this song was for his Lorraine.

Jacob sat down and read the words over and over, and began to cry. And what happened then was pretty wonderful. Jacob decided that the world needed to hear Lorraine's song. So he got in his car, with his guitar, and drove to Fred's house. And the two of them - Jacob, in his twenties, and Fred, 70 years older -came up with a tune. "You'll have to sing it," said Fred, "my singing scares people." So Jacob went back to the studio, and he sang it and recorded it, and then he put it on YouTube with an explanation about how it came to be -And all across this country people listened to the song, and wept, and shared it with their friends, and before long thousands upon thousands of people knew how much Fred loved and missed his Lorraine. I listened again and again – I'll tell you, the song's in my head right now and I would share it with you, but, like Fred, I know my singing scares people.

And I was thinking about why this happened, why this song captured people's hearts so. And it seems to me that it was for the same reason that what we do today captures us so.

Fred spoke the name of his love so that all would know, so that all of us would know that her name was Lorraine, and she was his, and she was cherished. And we do the same today. We speak the names so all will know. We speak the names of God's newest angels; and we declare that they were ours, and they were cherished. Just as Fred named his sweet Lorraine, so we today have named our Mikey and Michael, our Art and Allen and Sue and so many, many more whom we have spoken aloud. These are the ones we loved, the ones for whom our songs are sung today, the ones for whom the bells today have rung. We have named them. We have called them by name. On this Remembrance Sunday, we call them by name.

And more than that, today we remember who it is who calls us each by name. Perhaps my favorite passage from the bible, the one that I find most comforting, is this one, from the book of Isaiah: *But now thus says the Lord, the One who created you: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you...*

I have called you by name.

For those of us in the room old enough to remember the TV show *Cheers*, you remember its theme song: Where everybody knows your name - It went *I want to go where everybody knows my name*. Okay, so, yes, that was about a bar in Boston, but the song tapped into something we all feel -- That's a universal longing, that longing to be known by name; to matter enough to others that they know you by name; to be greeted by name - to be called by name. Who doesn't want to walk into a place where everyone knows your name?

And what Isaiah reminds us is that everywhere we go is a place where our name is known. Everywhere we go, there is one who knows our name, because we worship a God who knows each one of us that intimately, who cherishes each one of us that dearly. I have called you by name, you are mine. What is so profoundly comforting about our God, what is so powerfully reassuring about our God, is that ours is a God who knows us as no one else knows us. And that therefore the ones whom we loved are safe in the arms of One who knows their name.

When Fred Stobaugh heard his song completed for the first time, when he put the headphones and heard his words sweetly sung, he smiled a smile of pure joy, and said, with tears glistening in his eyes, "Lorraine is listening to this, and she's smiling too." That is the power of our faith. And the power of a day like this. That we can know as surely as anything can be known that those whose names we name today are listening. That those whose names we name today are alive and loved and cherished and well and safe in the arms of the One who calls us each by name.

In these next few moments, we share communion. We share a holy meal with those around us now, and those who love us from afar. And we share it around a table to

which each one of us has been called by name. We share it at the table of our Lord, who sets a place for each of us.

I have called you by name, he says. You are mine.

Amen.