

Re-named (2020)

Luke 13:10-17

Feb. 16 2020

Next Saturday evening,
as you've already mentioned in our Announcements,
we're having what we're calling a celebration of FOCI,
a celebration of what this church does through Friends of Christ in India,
a celebration of the work that's done by faithful folks with loving hearts for
sisters and brothers in need.

We chose the word celebration on purpose –
because to be part of that work really is uplifting;
it is joyful in the same way that putting a roof on a home in West Virginia
brings joy,
or taking a trunk full of food to Operation Hope,
or tutoring a kid.

You've heard me say before that my favorite word in Telugu,
the language spoken in our part of India,
is Santosham.

It means joy – happiness – delight.

Pretty much the only thing I know how to say,
after 20 years of traveling to India,
is *challah, challah santosham*

Which means, I'm very very happy.

And I say it a lot.

One of the things that gives me greatest joy when I'm there is the privilege that
I'm given on many visits,
the privilege of baptizing someone who has made the decision to become a
Christian.

Last year it was on New Year's Day,
in a little village where people had gathered from miles away to worship
together –

New Year's Day worship is a big deal in the Christian community there. The church we'd gathered at was too small to hold all the worshipers, so we were outside, kids and adults sitting cross-legged on the ground for the three-hour service of song and dance and scripture and the American lady preaching. And after worship, it was time for baptisms. So a little group of us went to the back of the church, to the baptism pool. There's none of this dribbling a little water on the forehead there -- In India, for a baptism, you are all in.

Full immersion.

There were two women who had come to be baptized, who nervously, quietly, answered the question put to them by the pastor:
 Do you believe in Jesus Christ as your only Lord and Savior?
 Are you ready to be baptized into the faith of Jesus Christ?

Yes, they said.

And as the crowd started shouting Hallelujah, I climbed into the baptism tank, wondering, once again, why I *never* remember to bring a change of clothes to church there.

And into the tank with me climbed the first of the women to be baptized. I went to put my arms around her to lay her back in the water, but the Indian pastor in charge called out "wait, wait!"

And then he said "What name? What name are you giving her?"

And I remembered.

Of course. When we baptize someone in India, they receive a new name.

I turned to the woman. "Mary," she told me. "Mary."

And with love and hope and great delight,

I lowered her into the water --

and I said "Mary,

I baptize you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."

And as we emerged from the water, well-soaked, both of us,

the pastor proclaimed that she was in a new creation in Christ.

It's a big, big deal to be baptized,
 it's a big, big deal to set aside what and who you have been and to choose to
 be part of a minority religion –
 it is a big deal to say “here is where I have found love. Here I know grace.”
 And Mary – newly-named Mary – was shining with such joy.
 Santoshum.

I saw her this year –
 we were both again at church on New Year's Day.
 She came running up to me, and pointed to herself.
 “*Mary*,” she said, with great pride.
 “I remember,” I said.

In the scripture story that (Kate/ Brooke) just read to you,
 a woman is given a new name.
 She, too, becomes a new creation in Christ –
 not through baptism,
 but through the saving love of Jesus just the same.

One day in the synagogue, the story says,
 one Sabbath day in the synagogue, Jesus was teaching.
 And we know what he was teaching, because we know what he always taught:
 Love.
 And a crowd had gathered, of course, a huge crowd had gathered.
 And the story says that Jesus looked out over all those people,
 looked across the room, and saw a woman hunched over in pain.

There's no name for this woman --
 the story tells us only the name that she was called:
 The Bent-Over Woman. The bent over woman.
 She'd been crippled for 18 years, the story says,
 her back so bent she could never straighten up,
 never see around her.
 She could only see the ground beneath her,

she could only hear the people uttering their taunts and abuse.
And they did, they did.

Because remember when this was:

remember that this was a time when to be maimed, to be crippled,
meant that you must have offended God somehow...
or your parents had, or maybe their parents.

And remember that this was a time when a woman was considered less than
human.

So, crippled woman that she was, she was doubly less than human.

So here she was, this woman, and this was the sum total of who she was:
the Bent Over woman.

And Jesus sees her.

She hadn't asked for help -- he just sees her, sees her completely.

And he calls her to him, and says to her tenderly, "woman, you are set free",
and he puts his hands on her, embraces her, holds her,
and she -- she stands up straight.

After 18 years, she stands up straight.

But the story isn't over.

The priest guy, the minister there, he gets indignant.

Hey! he says, There's no working on the Sabbath.

If someone wants to get healed by you, let them come some other day of the
week.

Well, Jesus never took stuff like that very well,
and he doesn't put up with it now.

Here's what he says:

"Really?" he says "Really?"

Huh.

'Cause you know full well that if you have a donkey or an ox at home
you're going to do some work for it on the Sabbath.

You're going to feed it. Then you're going to untie it and lead it to the stream
and give it water. You're going to do all that. For your donkey. On the
Sabbath."

And then Jesus says this:

"Ought not this daughter of Abraham,
be set free from bondage on a Sabbath day?"

Daughter of Abraham.

There were not any more powerful words Jesus could have spoken,
no more powerful name he could have given to over,
this Bent Over woman,
this nameless shamed woman.

A daughter of Abraham.

An heir, in other words, to all of God's promises,
a child of greatness, a child of God.

In that moment, Jesus gave her her new name.

Her true name.

In that moment, that woman was no longer defined by the name that others
called her,

or the names she'd grown accustomed to calling herself.

In that moment she knew her **real** name:

child of God, daughter of Abraham.

In that moment, she was re-named.

This week, I saw an article online
noting that it had been exactly 35 years since the movie
'The Breakfast Club' was released.

It also noted that the movie remains hugely popular with teens,
whose parents were themselves teens when it came out.

If by chance it's a film you've missed,

The Breakfast Club – 1985 –

is set in a high school library,

on a Saturday morning,

where five teens have been sentenced, as it were,

to a Saturday detention.

And they are as different as high school teens can be,

or at least they think so –

they are, in the words of the film,

a brain, a princess, an athlete, a basket case, and a criminal.

But over the course of a day together,

they each discover who the others truly are,
and the hurts and hopes that each one carries with them.

The movie is about names, in the end,
about the names, the labels, that they have each been given by others –
and about discovering who they truly are.

Discovering their true names.

Allowing themselves to be re-named.

Molly Ringwald, one of the actors in the film,
says that, to this day, people come up to her and thank her for the movie.
Many, she says, are LGBT, or people of color,
even though neither is a theme of the movie directly.

The movie saved me, one of them even told her,
because it showed teenagers discovering who they truly were,
beyond what other people defined them as.

It's a movie, yes, and an old movie at that now.

But people's longing to be known by their true name continues.

I read a powerful story not long ago,

told by a seminary professor

who had been asked to lead a weekend retreat for students.

The retreat was designed to help the seminarians get a better sense of their
calling,

to figure out what gifts God had given them to use.

And the last activity of the weekend was meant to help each student name
what their gift, their talent was.

They were asked to speak it aloud by naming themselves.

So, for instance, one student stood and said "My name is Listener,"
and another, a gifted speaker, said "My name is Preacher."

And so it went, each of them saying aloud the name they felt God giving them.
Until it came to the turn of one young man, and he stood, and said ... nothing.
They waited, and waited,
and finally he said "I have looked for my name for three days.

But it isn't there."

And then he said "it's not that I don't want any of these names I hear you saying. I do. But none of them are strong enough.

None are strong enough to undo the name my father already gave to me, over and over again.

The name he gave me is "Not Good Enough." he said.

"This is my name: not good enough."

And the professor who tells this story said that they all sat there, drowning in silence,

until one of them stood up, and then another, and another, and they went to that young man and encircled him.

And one after another said this to him:

"You are God's Beloved Child. You are God's Beloved Child."

The names that others give to us can be painful.

The names we give ourselves can be just as hurtful, maybe more.

Are there names by which you have been called?

Are there names by which you have known yourself, defined yourself, limited yourself?

Are there names that hurt – like "not good enough?"

God has a new name for you.

And it is Child of God.

It is Beloved One.

It is Cherished. Precious. Gift.

God gives you this name

as surely as Jesus re-named the Bent Over woman:

Daughter of Abraham.

Child of God.

Three weeks ago,

at our 9:00 service,

our House Band sang – Fred Zarrilli, Joe Holland, Christine Parisella.

What they sang was a song titled, "I Will Change Your Name."

And these are the words they sang to us:

*I will change your name
You shall no longer be called
Wounded, outcast, lonely or afraid
I will change your name
Your new name shall be
Confidence, joyfulness, overcoming one.
Yes.*

Daughter of the Promise.
Son of the Covenant.
Friend of Christ.
Child of God.

This is who we are.
This is what we live.
This is how we are most truly known
by the One who calls us by name
and knows us by heart.
Amen.