

Sermon for 2017 Yr A Easter 4 (Baptism)
Preached Sunday 5/7/2017 at St. James', Mount Vernon
By the Rev. Charles F. Brock

I was at Shrine Mont earlier this week for the annual Spring Clergy Conference.

I met a priest there, the woman who has been called to be the new rector of Historic Christ Church. She told me about a YouTube video that some of you might have already seen. In it a giggly 4-year old, with much prompting and encouragement, begins to recite the Lord's Prayer. She says,

Our Father, who art in heaven, That'll be my name.

That'll be my name.

Kids say the darndest things. I don't imagine that this little girl understood what she was saying, but she comes pretty close to nailing the hope that we all receive through baptism... that we will receive the name that the Father gives us.

In the rite of baptism, we affirm that we reject Satan and all those powers that corrupt and destroy the creatures of God, all those forces that would give us a name other than our God-given name.

The powers of the world want to define us, to label us, to put us in boxes that limit and restrict us, to give us names that separate and divide us. Satan wants us to accept names other than the name that God gives us, names that give him power over us.

And so we struggle with the names that lie heavy upon us, some names that we resist, some names that we take for granted. Names like male and female, black and white, Gentile and Jew and Muslim, liberal and conservative, rich and poor. Citizen and immigrant. Episcopal and Anglican. Names that presume to tell us whom we are, or whom we are supposed to be. Names that claim to define whom others are to us.

You can all think of names like these. Once you get started thinking of them, they just keep coming.

Some of these names are positive, some are negative. Some names we desire and are proud of, other names we fear or despise.

We may call ourselves by these names, or we may struggle against the names that others call us. And we may call others by these names or by other names. But God knows that the names we use are not true.

They are not true, because these names do not name whom we are. Whom we are is much greater than our names, much greater than whom others think we are, much greater even than whom we think we are.

We are nothing, nothing less than beloved children of God, nothing less. Our name, the one true name that each of us has from God, is beloved. No other name gets to the heart of how God sees us, knows us, and loves us.

What are your names?

What names have been given you that limit you, that box you into an identity that is only a part of who God has made you to be?

What names do you have that you hide behind, that separate you from others who do not use that name? Names that cut you off from the fullness of the life that God has given you?

And what names do you call others that deny the full depth and breadth of their humanity?

We are baptizing today. And so I want to come back to that prayer I began with.

Our Father, who art in heaven, that'll be my name.

Today, Sophie, I will baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As I pour water on you, you will be bathed in the name of our Father, enfolded by the name of the Son, anointed with the name of the Holy Spirit. Today, Sophie, we affirm that you have the name that God has given to each of us. Let us always remember—the name God gives us is beloved.

Alleluia. Christ is risen.
The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.