

## SERMON – HOLY NAME

JANUARY 1, 2015

There is something that every person and everything in this room has in common – **a name**. Not just humans but everything - animal, plant, nation, star, galaxy, ocean, river, country, continents...We all have names –Suzanne, Barbara, Pamela, Jennie, and Bob – altar, candles, floor, and flowers. There is no escaping a name and it all goes back to Adam.

Names are often strange things. First names can be weird or plain. We live in an era of made up names – (just look at the children of celebrities) - ones you have never heard before and will not be found in any baby book. But the good old tried and true ones still appear on birth certificates – John, Bill, Dave, Mary, and Sue. Each era has its popular names for boys and girls – they come in and out of fashion. Some we wish we were not saddled with - as Johnny Cash made famous in his song “A boy named Sue”. And I know many people who have lived with names they never liked – enough to change them legally or on becoming a Sister.

Last names can be a window into all sorts of information. We can often ferret out information about someone’s ancestors. Barbara Jean’s family most likely had something to do with packing. A name like Johansson represents a heritage - the son of Johann. Last names also can help identify geographic ancestry. Sr Margo has a talent for honing in on those with Irish heritage. English, Polish, Russian, Scandinavian, African – names can give clues to all of these nationalities.

Some are instantly recognizable – there will ever only be one Elvis no matter how many imitators come along.

Names can also be labels. We all remember “sticks and stones can hurt my bones, but names can never hurt me”. (For the record I never really believed that they did not hurt!) But with labels we get into tricky territory. They may be self-proclaimed like Mohammed Ali’s “the Greatest”. Some are complimentary – smart, talented, wise. Some are descriptive. But many have a negative inclination. Stupid, lazy, autistic, crippled, disabled ... may be ones we hear. The

best thing about Political Correctness may be that it has diminished the social acceptance of labels and ethnic slurs.

We're all familiar with brand names and generics – most of time with our prescriptions. But these can also apply to individuals. Instead of someone being Mr. Smith the astrophysicist, he can quickly turn into being labeled a Black man. This is when we run into stereotypes of races, nationalities and ethnic groups. Nationalities and races in the past have been associated with drinking, neatness to a fault, extreme work ethic, natural rhythm, failures, lack of potential, brilliance in chess, destined for jail..... Obviously all of these are not negative but any of them diminish the individual by making a person generic with a group label even if he or she is as far from that as can possibly be.

I got to experience this first hand during my time on Indian Island. The first night we were asked to throw out whatever words came to us when we heard the name Indian – we went through alcohol, tobacco, totems, Tonto, teepees, unemployed and about every stereotype that you have ever heard. After a week of interaction and deep learning about our island hosts' culture and history, the exercise was repeated. Now the flip chart was covered with words like traditional, preservationists, well-educated, hardworking, respectful, naturalists, conservationists, respectful of elders, spiritual..... All of these a far cry from the negative stereotypes.

So from the outset we carry our given names, a last name and maybe a middle name. We have a family history and heritage even if our families have been here for generations.

There are also others who are named or had a name change ordained by God. Abraham, Sarah, Peter to name a few. And there are those named by God and with the news conveyed by Gabriel. **“His name is John” ... He shall be called Emmanuel (God with us), Wonderful, Counselor, Prince of Peace, Almighty God, Lord of Lords and King of Kings.** Gabriel comes to Zechariah in the temple and announces that at the birth of their unexpected miracle baby, he will be named John – certainly a name that caused confusion then because it did not fit with the family's history. And then there was Gabriel's message to Mary that her son would be named Jesus. The name at which every knee must bow. The name that deserves respect above all others.

But do not sell yourself short – honor your own name in the sense that it represents you and all that is within you and all you can be. See it as a sign of your authentic self. We are blessed with a secret name given by God that only God knows. This name is our *true name* – the one that represents our full potential, especially in God’s sight.

Our coming into the world and our existence was not announced by prophets or heralded by angels or immortalized in Handel’s music....

BUT.....

WHY CAN WE NOT BE?

- ❖ WONDERFUL!
- ❖ COUNSELORS!
- ❖ REPRESENTATIVES OF PEACE!
- ❖ GOD IN THE WORLD!

WHY CAN’T WE BE ALL OF THAT!