

Sermon - December 18, 2016 - Advent 4,

"What's in a Name?"

Matthew 1:18–25



Introduction:

Dear Friends in Christ!

Have you ever wondered or used the phrase: "What's in a name?" If you haven't used it, chances are you have heard it. What's in a name anyways? Wasn't it Shakespeare who uses it in his Romeo and Juliet's work? There, he also said "That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet."

This quote suggests that Shakespeare's belief is that a name means little - it is the worth of the individual that counts. But today, when you hear that question, chances are it is in connection to something else, the question applies also applies to anything in life that appears to have a grandeur meaning.

All you need to know is what something is, not what it's named. I don't care much about names or brands, but what I'm buying. Think of medications for example, brands shouldn't matter that much but the chemical compositions or ingredients there in. Some brands of medication for example are more expensive than generic ones, which in theory they will work the same.

So what's in a name? That is a good question. So we might agree with Shakespeare on this one, or maybe not, at least not so quickly, because Shakespeare might be wrong on this one.

What's in a name? Everything! A rose by another name would not smell as a rose, and you by another name would not be you!

What's in a name? Everything! That's what the Gospel reading for today reveals.

Actually, from the creation of world naming is a fundamental human activity, it is a part of what and who we are.

In traditional cultures naming goes with a meaning, not just choosing names for a child but associate it with a meaning. Through names people declare identity and connection, and in many cases names actually define a person, his character, his abilities and so on.

In our Gospel reading for today, we are given two names with a meaning that surpass any other meaning in names: Jesus and Immanuel. Jesus means the "Lord saves" and Immanuel means "God with us." That's the message that the angel conveyed to Joseph.

What a timely message for Joseph, it did help him make the right decision in his unexpected situation, a pregnant wife and if that wasn't enough, the baby she is carrying is not his. And to complicate matters, his cultural tradition, the laws of his

time were helping his situation because, on the one hand he really loved Mary, and on the other hand he was a righteous man. As a righteous man what was he to do? He needed to obey the laws and moral costumes, but also needed to demonstrate that he loved Mary very much. What was he going to do? But as in God's case, love always wins. Joseph's righteousness proved right! All of course wasn't an easy process, but here is where God steps in, in his decision making. The angel that appeared to him assures him that this is God's plan. That God came to dwell with men, so that he would save them, therefore to call the baby Jesus and Immanuel.

So, what's in these names? Everything and Joseph was going to be a part of it. And not only Joseph but you and I, because these names, figuratively represent the human story, the human condition and its outcome. But most importantly these names define and point that which Jesus is and will do.

And as we consider these names, here is something that you might not be aware of, the name "Jesus" is the English translation of the Greek name Iesous, which in turn is a Greek translation of the Hebrew name Joshua. And Joshua means "The Lord is salvation."

Joshua is what you would call a combination name, it combines two Hebrew words, one which is salvation and the other is Yahweh, the name of God. Thus Jesus means "The Lord is salvation."

So what's in a name? Everything! "He – Jesus – will save his people from their sins" (v 21). He will come so that he would bear on himself our sins and die in our place on a cross, and that by his wound we would be healed.

Jesus means salvation, our salvation, and the salvation of many, that's his mission, that all be saved, saved from sin, and sin's consequences.

When Jesus begun his ministry, his work, and his mission, he read from the Old testament and what he read he said, was all about him. This is what he read: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me," he said, "because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." (Luke 4:18-19)

In these words we see in action what the angel said he was going to do. And He did, he is doing even now and will continue until the end of times.

His mission was to save the lost, to reach out to the poor, to deliver the captives, to restore sight to the blind, and to lift up the downtrodden. This mission is as relevant today as it was then. And in the process he involves us, you and I, just as did with Joseph and Mary, therefore we should commit ourselves to fulfilling His mission even now.

Beyond the physical conditions which you and I have seen and are aware of, millions of people live in spiritual darkness. They are crushed by a load of sin and its consequences that torment them. The light of truth has not yet dawned in their lives. Even us, as sinful human beings we do suffer sin too, but at least we know where to go to whenever the load of our sins torment us, but many don't.

Now all through his ministry, Jesus did what the prophet had said he will do. Jesus went about showing great concern for the poor. That is the economically destitute, not only the poor in spirit but also the economically poor, those who were oppressed and unjustly treated.

As Jesus said he would do, now he sends us too, to help them and preach the Good News to them, through word and action, for the Good News is for everybody.

Jesus preached a message of salvation. It included repentance and faith. It includes the forgiveness of sins and concern for the poor. It includes deliverance from sin and sickness. It included the good news of the coming kingdom and of the final day of deliverance. The truth is that when the Gospel transforms our spiritual lives, it will also affect all other aspects of life.

Jesus is concerned about captives too. We usually understand as captives the ones who were captured as prisoners of war. We need to be concerned about them too, but what Jesus was concerned about the most were those who have been enslaved by Satan. Jesus released them. Today too, many are Satan's captives. They are under his influence. They may be captives of habits, attitudes, and lifestyles that they cannot control. You and I may be one of them. And certainly those who don't know or haven't heard the Gospel yet, they still live in Satan's dark trap.

What is your condition today? Are you enslaved by habits, by thoughts that you cannot control, by circumstances that overpower you? Do you know anybody who can benefit from the light of the Gospel right now?

We do have the good news of Christ coming at Christmas, in fact we do have the Good News of Jesus who came to set us free, from sin, from Satan, from our flesh.

Through the Word and the Spirit, through the sacraments, He still speaks each one today. He is offering us freedom, freedom that he won for us with his life as he was crucified on our behalf but on the third day came back to life, and that life is yours and mine, in him, by faith, by grace, that is freely given to us today.

Jesus is concerned about the blind too. Of course he was concerned about the ones physically blind. But most importantly he is concerned about the spiritually blind, all over we find them. They have no idea of spiritual truth. The eyes of their souls cannot see. They live in darkness.

But today Christ is present to heal. The recovery of sight simply meant that the person who was blind could now see. I'm sure some of that has happened and will continue to happen, but it is true, many who have been spiritually blind are being set free. Jesus is opening their eyes, through his word, through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is concerned about the downtrodden. Who are they? They are the ones who have been bruised by life. The Greek verb means to break into pieces. The bruising can be both in body and in spirit. Many are broken and crushed spiritually and physically.

Once again, the Spirit empowers Jesus to bring the benefits of the Kingdom of God into life on earth. Jesus was set apart and sent by the Spirit to set at liberty those who are downtrodden and bruised. While He was on the earth, He delivered men and women from the oppression of their spirits and bodies.

Sometimes the deliverance comes by a change of attitude in our own hearts through the forgiveness of our sins and the new life Christ gives us in our baptisms.

How many times have you felt downtrodden and broken? The circumstances of life have taken their toll. You don't know whether or not you can get up and go again. Just remember that Jesus identifies with you in every moment of brokenness.

Conclusion:

So, what' in a name? Everything, Jesus, Immanuel!—this is the name of God's Son and Messiah, our Savior. Like other names, the name of Jesus indicates what this man has done and does: he saves his people from sin and gives them new life. His mission was to save the lost, to reach out to the poor, to deliver the captives, to restore sight to the blind, and to lift up the downtrodden.

And unlike other names, Jesus' name continues to point to him as Savior, because he continues to carry out his saving work through his Gospel. And because this is the most blessed work, for us Jesus remains the most blessed name. As the people he has delivered and made his own, we can confess with the apostle Peter, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Amen.