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Holy Comforter

Richmond, VA

September 18, 2016; Year C, Proper 20; the 18th Sunday after Pentecost

Readings: Jeremiah 8:18-9:1; Psalm 79:1-9; 1 Timothy 2:1-7; Luke 16:1-13

What is in a Name?

Heavenly Father, through my weak human words, give us grace to hear your true and living Word, *Amen*.

Welcome, we have gathered today for what is perhaps the most joyous occasion a family and community can celebrate, we are welcoming of a new baby into our community, a baptism, and the naming of this beautiful child.

In many cultures and traditions throughout our wonderful and diverse world, a name is a special part of a person, part of a person's essence and being.

In preparing for today's sermon, I realized the act of naming something or someone AND the act of making choices were too powerful themes I kept returning too and could be denied.

My homiletic instructor would say, "It is never a good idea to have two themes in one sermon". However, both topics compel me to break from "Proper Homiletic Protocol".

Since this is Holy Comforter, breaking protocol is not such a bad thing. Here is the first theme.

The scriptures today were gloomy and depressing, Jeremiah's "Lamentations for Jerusalem", Timothy's Instruction on worship, and the Parable of the Shrewd Manager are not the type of stories you want to hear on such a joyous day.

I asked our rector if we could use alternate readings for a baptism, she said... "No"...

In Luke today we hear the biblical equivalent of an executive building a "Golden Parachute" for himself at the end of his career. That is what the dishonest manager in today's gospel was doing. He knew his career was over.

He knew his days as the steward were numbered, he did not want to do manual labor, and God forbid he beg like a peasant. These options were out of the question.

So he thought and thought what to do? What to do?

I have got it, he decided to reduce the amount the master's debtors owed his boss to gain favor with these people. To buy favor for himself with his employer's money.

Unbelievably the master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. *⁹And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.*

"Uh? What did he say?" Make friend for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, NO WAY...

It is hard to believe but it appears Jesus, tells us this behavior is to be rewarded. This story from Luke comes immediately after the

Parable of the Prodigal Son. There are several similarities between these apparently very different stories.

- Both the Steward and the Son were very selfish,
- Both the Steward and the Son are in big trouble, the Son is penniless; he squandered his inheritance on earthly pleasures. The Manager is caught stealing from his employer and I assume has squandered his plunder away,
- Both the Steward and the Son selfishly figure a way out of their situation. Selfishness drove the Son to return home and the manager selfishly was able to think his way out of his situation.
- Both stumbled into Grace and Forgiveness. Forgiveness that was waiting for them all along,
- Both the Steward and the Son had difficult choices to make.

It is hard to believe but it appears Jesus, tells us this behavior is to be rewarded.

Well, not exactly, what Jesus is saying to his disciples and to us is to be shrewd in “arranging” all of the aspects of their lives so that “they may delight in his will, and walk in his ways, to the glory of his name”. (Book of Common Prayer)

That if you choose to change the path you are on, there is no time like the present.

Jesus must have been desperate for his disciples to fully commit to their urgent call, time was running out. As crazy as it seems this example is good news for us.

Sometimes God calls for a radical “reordering” of life’s priorities. At those times, we are faced with difficult choices. It takes all the

shrewdness we can muster. Luke warns us not to serve two-masters.

If I look at my life and where I am today in my ministry, I would have to say there has been a radical reordering of my life's priorities that has transformed me.

I wish I had only two masters.

We all have many, many masters to serve; our families, our employers, our homes, our friends, our ministries, our health, our God, and ourselves.

Keeping your life in balance, takes shrewdness, prayer, discernment but ultimately the choice we make are ours alone. The choices we make can, with the Grace of God, be transformative. However, remember this, not making a decision or delaying is a choice...

Now the Second, far more positive theme

What is in a name?

This is a common cliché to some.

Never the less, your name is your reputation, your name can confer affluence or privilege, naming a child confers individuality upon that person. In the West, your name and your identity can be easily changed. You can reinvent yourself; you can change your identity like changing a hat.

However, in the East a name carries much greater significance.

In fact, the Hebrew word “*shem*” or the Greek word “*onoma*” appears in the bible over 1,000 times, that fact alone shows the significance given to a name.

In the Jewish tradition, a child is given his or her own name, but they are also given a Hebrew name. Thus through this tradition we recognize the child’s individuality but also her place in the Jewish Community and family.

There is great power and responsibility in the naming of someone or something astronomers and scientist get to name new discoveries. The importance of a person’s name is noted many times in both the old and New Testament.

- In Exodus and 1 Kings naming something indicates one’s ownership of that person or thing,
- In Genesis, and Samuel II forgetting God’s name is equivalent of departing from God,
- The prophets and messengers were all acting in someone’s name,
- Jesus being presented at the temple was his naming ceremony.

The examples can go on and on.

A name is far more than a simple identifier. It is more like a road sign at a cross road that points us in three directions. The primary function is to identify a particular man or woman. It bestows individuality.

However, names can also recall the past; often, if you are named after a relative it can bestow certain expectations based upon the memories of the relative’s past.

Can you imagine the expectation on a young boy named Moses or Abraham? Names may also predict the future, express hope, and predict a destiny.

Names can carry multiple messages....

Through our traditions, a Christening is the giving of a Christian name at Baptism as a sign of admission to a Christian Church.

The Jewish tradition of Naming the child with a Jewish name, we prepare them to carry their culture, and bless them on their way.

Soon the Words "I baptize you Betsy, In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" will be said and a cross will be drawn on her forehead marking her as one of God's children. Her Hebrew name will be another sign of her joining her family.

Micah and Courtenay are following at least in part an ancient Jewish custom; they are marking the beginning of their commitment to raise her in the Jewish traditions and customs'.

Shortly we all will be asked to begin our commitment to her in the Baptismal Covenant. Not only are we asked to choose for her, but also we choose to renew our own Baptismal Covenant.

Please listen carefully...

To the choices, we will be asked to make,

- ✓ Will you continue in the apostles teaching and fellowship, in breaking of the bread and in the prayers?
- ✓ Will you preserve to resist evil, and whenever you fall into sin? Repent and return to the lord?

- ✓ Will you proclaim by word and by example the Good News of God in Christ?
- ✓ Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?
- ✓ Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

All these questions represent choices that we are faced with every day.

Our Christian and Jewish traditions and customs are very similar.

Both traditions name this beautiful child as one of God's children.

Both mark a joyous new beginning for her journey, hopefully, a lifetime of wise choices.

Perhaps?

It is also a new beginning for all of us where we shrewdly rearrange the priorities in our lives.

Amen