

From the reading of Isaiah:

*The Lord called me before I was born,
While I was in my mother's womb, he named me.*

Our gospel reading today opens with the words, “the next day.” These three words make it clear that we are in the middle of an ongoing story. John’s gospel narrative has come from that expansive space of the prologue: “In the beginning was the Word,” to the here and now. It’s the next day. We are at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry on the ground. John goes on to describe how John the Baptist saw Jesus approach and said, “Look, here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” This is the same God, the same Word, that John’s gospel declared came into being—the light of life, the light of all people. And John the Baptist continues describing what he has experienced. He says he saw the spirit descend on Jesus and stay there. It’s still there. And he declares Jesus is the son of God!

Then again, John writes about another “next day.” Jesus walks by and John the Baptist declares to those with him, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” This kind of thing is very familiar, right? Imagine yourself standing by the potatoes in Trader Joe’s. You look up, and there’s Fr. Richard standing back by the bananas. You say with delight, “Hey, how’s it going?” You recognize each other. You see each other. But you are likely to go on with your shopping. You probably won’t follow each other around to see what’ for dinner. Like Jesus. You’ll walk on.

But on this next day, John’s gospel reports that some of John the Baptist’s disciples follow Jesus as he walks on. Jesus know he’s being followed and turns around and says, “What are you looking for?” You’ve probably had that kind of experience too. You just sense that someone is looking at you or following you. And so you look back to see. These people following Jesus don’t answer his question, but they call him Rabbi, teacher. “Rabbi,” they say. I

suspect they were all watching out for Jesus. It's obvious they are in a small neighborhood. It wasn't surprising to see Jesus walk by. And, they had likely heard John's testimony the day before. Maybe they were there at the baptism. So, they were probably looking for the Lamb of God, for the Messiah. But they don't yet know how to say that. Jesus doesn't wait for their answer; he just says, "Come and see". "Come and see what I am doing; see who I am."

Sometimes we don't really know what we are looking for. We may have a vague idea, but if someone asks, "what are you looking for?" We may say, "I really don't know. I'm looking for that thing...something to fix my car or my squeaky front door." Or maybe you might say, "I'm lost; I'm like a lost set of keys. I can't find my door!"

"Come and see," Jesus says. In other scripture passages we will read in coming weeks, Jesus says, "Follow me." Follow me—I'll lead you to the door; we'll fix what's broken together; I'll teach you how to fish." You know that saying, "If you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day; if you teach him *how* to fish, you feed him for a lifetime." Our scripture today ends on a similar theme. Andrew, one of John's followers who followed Jesus that day, later brought his brother Simon to meet Jesus. And Jesus gives Simon a new name. Jesus doesn't just say, "Hi Simon, Nice to meet you. Have some fish." No, he says, "You are Simon," meaning, "I see you. I see who you are. I see your potential, and I'm giving you a new name in recognition of who you will become for the rest of your life. You are to be called Cephas—Peter—which means, Rock." Jesus hasn't yet taught Simon, or Peter, how to fish, or how to live into his new name, but we know he will.

What does it mean to Simon to get a new name? What *is* a name? Name is fundamental, especially one's given or first name. It's one of the first words a baby learns to recognize. She figures out a profound connection exists between that sound repeated many,

many times by everyone around her and her body self. Name becomes central to our self-identity. It can be burdensome if, as we age, it doesn't fit us very well. Sometimes it's been replaced with a nickname that *may* be flattering, or not. Sometimes nicknames are babyish or derogatory in a cutesy sort of way. Name is important. There are famous names and many unremarkable ones. Most of us won't change our name even if we don't like it very much. If you were to change your name today, what would it be? What name would you choose?

Most women used to take their husband's surname at marriage like I did. Not so much anymore. Back in the day, people used to change their names to make them sound more English or to be shorter and easier to spell and pronounce. During reconstruction African Americans sometimes dumped the name of their previous owners that had been attached to them and took a new original unfettered name. Children who are adopted relinquish their birth name and adopt the new family name. In some traditions, people are given a saint's name at confirmation or first Holy Communion—a name that is inspirational: St. Theresa, St. Francis, St. Andrew.

We are presented at baptism by name. Our sponsor says, "I present ...(fill in your name)... to receive the Sacrament of Baptism." Then we, or our sponsors and family on our behalf, renounce Satan and accept Jesus. When we affirm the baptismal covenant, we are adopted as God's own; we become members of Christ's body. We become Christians.

It's been said that Jesus was not incarnated to found a new religion. And, it's been pointed out that Christ was not Jesus' last name. In Greek, Christ means the anointed one. And it's the Greek translation of the Hebrew word, Messiah which came to be understood by the Jews as a hoped-for deliverer. Originally, Christ was a title, but it came to be used by the followers of the risen Jesus as a proper name for their Lord. That led to their being called

Christians. Nowadays, there are many other names like Episcopalian, Lutheran, or Methodist that evolved to distinguish the community of believers along lines of belief or practice.

Sometimes these names divide more than they differentiate. In the best sense, they give people choices of ways to worship and serve. Here we are, gathering to worship and serve, calling ourselves Christians.

People can change their names, and they can change their religions. Think about Saul who became Paul—a Jew, a Pharisee and opponent of Jesus, who not only became a follower of the risen Jesus, but an apostle of Christ, a founder of churches throughout the regions in which he lived and traveled, and an author of scripture that today guides us in our lives as Christians. Think about Simon who became Peter and was given the keys to the kingdom. And think about yourselves. Some of you are known as “cradle” Episcopalians, born into a family of Episcopalians. Some, like me, have been received from one of those other denominations. Some may have found your way here by a non-religious route. However we got here, what does it mean to you to be called Christian today?

In some corners of the world, it is a dangerous name that invites persecution and demands courage to claim. In some corners of the world it has come to denote powerful repression, exclusivity, and rejection of those who are different from approved norms. In some corners of the world, it has or nearly has disappeared altogether. Does this mean the light Jesus brought into the world has dimmed or gone out completely? No, not at all.

Isaiah, the prophet we heard from earlier, declares we are a light to the nations that will reach to the end of the earth. And the psalmist declares many shall see and stand in awe. And Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, confirms that Christ will strengthen us to the end. He further encourages us that we are not lacking in any spiritual gift. Paul writes collectively here

to the church in Corinth, but he refers to every single saint everywhere. That's us. We are the little s saints also known as volunteers or helpers or professionals, or participants or receivers.

For most of us here this morning, we easily claim our name of Christian. There might be some visiting, exploring to see who we are. There might be some wondering if they can adopt this name Christian. Well, who are we? Our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry calls us the Episcopal Branch of the Jesus Movement. This is a movement of ordinary saints. We are saints offering showers and breakfast to those without. We are saints offering food from the pantry to those in need. We are saints making this space ready and inviting for you here now and through the week. We are saints who sing, teach, pray, study, tend children, help those who struggle, do a myriad of other things, *and* worship, raising up our prayers and praises to God. And, we are saints who sometimes doubt, can become afraid, can grieve loss, get angry about injustice, and think differently from our neighbors. We are saints capable of sin in thought, word, and deed. And we are a people of forgiveness—forgiving others as we ourselves are forgiven. We are both/and; we are all of the above. This truth is captured in the beautiful poem by Thich Nhat Hanh, the well-known Buddhist refugee monk and peace activist, *Call Me By My True Names* which ends with these lines:

“Please call me by my true names, so I can hear all my cries and laughs at once, so I can see that my joy and pain are one. Please call me by my true names, so I can wake up, and so the door of my heart can be left open, the door of compassion.”

Today is another “next day,” a day we are invited to come and see. What are we looking for?

May God's love and faithfulness keep us safe for ever. Amen.