

Second Sunday after the Epiphany—Year C

Isaiah 62:1-5

Psalm 36:5-10

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

John 2:1-11

***What's in a name?*** There's a lot of power in a name. We could probably ask Wiley and JanE just how long they spent thinking of the name for Ian Ambrose Thompson Smith who came into this world on Friday morning. Expectant parents turn name after name and infinite combinations of names over in their heads for months on end.

Hopes and dreams and maybe even history attach to a name. Along the way, names collect identity in powerful ways. Some names will serve us for a lifetime, and from time to time, some people *change* their name, always marking a significant shift in how they understand themselves.

My husband Jim went from “Doug” to “Jim” when he was 13. Jim was his father's name, and like Elisha when he saw Elijah depart into heaven, Jim received a potent share of his dad's spirit when his dad died, *a shift signified by taking on that new name.*

My mother went from “Virginia” to “Ginny” in her mid-20's when she met my Dad marking an entrance into a new circle of friends and leaning into a little less formality *and* a little more relaxed presence.

My shift came in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade—I went from “Cindy” to “Cyndi”—I know, I really went for it on that one, but if you were of a certain age in the late 70's inundated with *The Brady Bunch*, “Cindy” represented that cute little girl with ringlet pigtails, *so not me.* I wanted to be more grown-up than that, and to my logical mind, you *didn't* spell “Cynthia” with “Cin.” My 8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher made fun of me, but it was a big deal to me.

Name changes aren't always easy for the ones around us because people form images of who people are *under* that identity. Sometimes you will hear, *“That's not who you are; I know you as...”*

*But this name-changing business is as old as the scripture itself.*

God changed “Abram” to “Abraham” and “Sarai” to “Sarah” and “Jacob” to “Israel,” and today, God says clearly, “You shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give. You shall be a *crown of beauty*, a *royal diadem* in the hand of your God.” Pretty cool names.

God continues: “You shall no more be termed Forsaken or Desolate, but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her and your land Married.” Okay, *Married* is sort of weird name, but the identity *behind* that name is potent. God is saying you are mine *and* I am yours. This name change signifies a relationship that is covenanted, for the long haul, and full of delight. The

final name God reveals in this passage is “Joy”—the last words we hear are “so shall your God rejoice over you.”

We can also see **I Corinthians** as a series of names given. Try on the name “Gifted,” “Wise,” “Knowing,” “Faithful,” “Healer,” “Miracle-Worker,” “Prophet,” “Discerning,” “Gift of the Tongue,” “Translator of the Tongue,” “Seeker of the Common Good.” *Powerful names these are and powerful identities.*

And Jesus just might be getting a new name today in this passage from **John 2**. Maybe his name is changing *from* “My Hour Has Not Yet Come” *to* “Yes Mom,” and “Doer in the End,” and “Overflowing Abundance,” and “Master Winemaker.”

Let’s really think about the names we have been given along the way. *Some* are painful names that others hurl at us: “Loser,” “Worthless,” “Not Good Enough.” *Some* names we pick up along the way, *sometimes* consciously, *sometimes* not. *What names have you taken on?* “Frustrated,” “Fearful,” “Anxious,” “Resentful,” “Hopeless,” “Heaviness,” “Weary”? Maybe even some of the biblical ones: “Forsaken,” “Desolate,” “Not My Time”?

*Can you just pause and open yourself to the possibility of a name-change?*

*What new name might God be nudging you to adopt?* How about “Fear Not,” “Courageous,” “Hopeful,” “Joy,” “Gifted,” “Generative,” “Light of the World,” “Salt of the Earth”? Ah, that takes us to “Seasoned”. How about “Abundant Life,” “Power,” “Tenacious,” “Death Defying Resurrection,” or to pull in one of Isaiah’s favorites “Oak of Righteousness”? Or how about “Forgiven,” “Healed,” “Loved and Lovable,” “Made Whole”?

*What might shift in your identity if you allowed these new names to really take hold, even if others laughed at you for daring to claim a new name?* People like to keep their boxes just so, around themselves *and* around others; it’s a risky thing to let God give you a new name because it often leads you in a new direction. *But sometimes, the old name just isn’t lifegiving; it may even be life diminishing. Sometimes, we can’t become who we are meant to be within its confines. This isn’t what God wants for us. God is deeply, intimately, wholly in love with us, bound to us for eternity. God just can’t stop showering Delight and Possibility on us.*

*What are your names this day? Which ones need to be retired and which are ones God is inviting you to claim boldly?* There are a lot of names out there. God is calling you by a new name today. Spend some time discovering just what that new name is to be *and* let it lead you in a whole new way. Amen.

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