

A Sermon by the Rev. Canon Patricia Daniel-Turk on the Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost, September 25, 2011 at the Chapel of St. Mark in Port Royal, South Carolina.

There is Power in the Name!

The year is 1750, the place, a village in West Africa. Excitement fills the village as an infant son has been born to a young couple, Omoro and Binta. It is a special time for it is a time of naming. The Mandikas, the tribe to which Omoro and Binta belong, believe the name given carries great significance. Thus, a couple takes time...seven days to be exact...for contemplating, pausing, reflecting, before deciding upon a name. During the seven days, there is festivity, feasting, and dancing as the people wait in great anticipation to hear the name.

Omoro knows the importance of what he must do. It was believed a child will bear seven characteristics of the thing or person for which it is named.

THERE IS POWER IN THE NAME! MEANING IN THE NAME!

The day of naming has arrived. The center of the village is filled. Where there was once merriment and laughter, now there is silence and anticipation. Omor and Binta enter with their new born son as does the village elder or priest. Omoro holds his son and first whispers into the ear of his son. The Mandikas believe every person should be the first to hear its name. After the baby boy has heard his name, then and only then, will others hear it. So now the name is revealed to all those who have waited seven days to hear the name...Kunta Kinte.

Following the ceremony, Omoro takes the little boy to the edge of the village. Alone in the dark of the night, lit only by the moon and the stars, he lifts his new born son and says: **"Behold, the only thing greater than yourself."** Thus opens the book "Roots," which 30 some years ago made television history and forever changed how Americans would think of their origins.

Later when Kunta Kinte was captured by the slave traders and brought to America and sold as one buys and sells animals, the name again appears as significant. Once purchased, the slaves were given new names. But Kunta Kinte resisted...he would not take on a new name given by his "master." Some of the most riveting drama occurs as the young, frightened teenager tries to hold onto that which has meaning to him...power if you will...his name.

In both Hebrew and Babylonian thought, it was believed that existence was wrapped inescapably with a name. It was believed that you did not exist without a name. A name reflected character and personality, one's essence. A name was given with great care and held significance for both the individual and the community in which the named lived.

In today's (Philippians 2:1-13), we are met with the significance of another name...the name of Jesus. What's in a name?

Paul speaks to those at the church in Philippi, the church which had been so generous to him in his ministry. These early Christians, like those of the first communities in which Paul had preached, lived among an array of philosophies and beliefs. Paul addressed them as saints for they had chosen to live apart as this special community. Paul reminds them of the place of Christ in the life of those determined to follow him...the life change it required.

But it was necessary to continue to focus on the One, Jesus, to whom new allegiance was given. He was the One, the Christ, and how that messiahship manifested itself in the world and in the lives of those who followed him. They were to be different, because they were different in Christ.

It almost seems in those final verses that Paul himself was carried away as he told the story. Every preacher, every layperson knows the exhilaration of telling it, reliving it; remembering it. One can be more moved than the listener when telling the story.

I am reminded of homiletics class in seminary, when before any of us preached, the professor required that we recite the words from the hymn "I Love to Tell the Story," which captures such exhilaration:

I love to tell the story
Of unseen things above,
Of Jesus and his glory,
Of Jesus and his love.
I love to tell the story,
Because I know 'tis true;
It satisfies my longings
As nothing else can do.

I love to tell the story,
'Twill be my theme in glory,

To tell the old, old story,
Of Jesus and his love

I love to tell the story;
'tis pleasant to repeat
what seems, each time I tell it,
more wonderfully sweet.

Paul then reminds the church in Philippi...however meaningful they have found the relationship of Christ to be, however much their life was to change in relationship with Christ...Christ was not their sole possession; No little tribal or geographical deity; Exclusive to no one race or nation. So in his excitement, which bubbles forth because of his relationship with Christ, he exclaims and loves to tell the story...that sweet, sweet story, that becomes more wonderfully sweet each time he tells it.

Therefore, God has highly exalted him and gave him the name, that above every name, so that at the name of Jesus, every knee shall bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 3:9-11)

POWER IN THE NAME!

Can you recall a circumstance when hearing a name or calling one brought calm, peace, or fear? Henri Nouwen, the late Dutch, Roman Catholic priest, who has impacted so many lives, wrote a little book "In the Name of Jesus." In it, he suggests the depth of the relationship one has that gives meaning to the name.

POWER IN THE NAME! BECAUSE THERE IS POWER IN THE ONE NAMED!

Oh that you and I and the whole world would know such power, such peace, such purpose, such hope, because we know the One Named!

THE NAME HAS POWER, BECAUSE ONE KNOWS THE ONE NAMED

So Christians sing with special meaning...

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus
There is something about that name!
Master! Saviour! Jesus!
Like the fragrance after the rain
Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!
Let all heaven and earth proclaim
Kings and kingdom's will all pass away,
But there's something about that name.
Jesus, Jesus, Jesus!

THERE IS POWER IN THE NAME!