

**Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island Maryland, 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Pentecost, August 25, 2024.**

Last Sunday we considered the importance of Names. Think of today as Part 2 of this subject.

Our lessons today are State of the Union-like. Here's the setting (**Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18**). Joshua gathers all the tribes of Israel ... and summons the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers. He reminds his audience of their responsibility: to revere the Lord, to serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; and to put away the little gods.

He chooses a psalm (**Psalms 34:15-22**) filled with hope and confidence. "The face of the Lord is against those who do evil .... He, the Lord, is near to the broken-hearted and will save those whose spirits are crushed."

The audience is moved. "Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods; for it is the Lord our God ...who did those great signs in our sight."

Then Joshua speaks of the future, again from the psalm. "Stand therefore and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness."

Then, on behalf of the Lord, Joshua makes a promise: "This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which our ancestors ate, they died. No, the one who eats this bread will live forever."

And who is Joshua talking about? Well, he is speaking of the Messiah. Not on the ground yet, but soon to be called by His Father with this message: "Whoever receives me will live because of me." Hope? Yes. Confidence? Mixed. Caution? Yes. But, on whole, there is hope. And more than hope. Trust!

Sounds like us, doesn't it? We gather in faith. We don't have all the answers to life's questions, but we have enough experience to want to learn more. And one of our "learning more" classes is Jesus. And how to sign up for that class? We go to Church, with a capital C. And we continue to note the importance of Names.

Yes, this place, this environment, this history, this faith, our own life experiences, and the life experiences of others whom we trust – all suggest that we are where we ought to be and want to be. Loved by, challenged by, confirmed by, surprised by, comforted by a first century carpenter with the Name of Jesus.

Which takes us to our final hymn today: *At the Name of Jesus*. It is hymn # 435. It is more than hopeful. It is confident. “Name him, Christians, name him, with love strong as death, name and awe and wonder and with bated breath; he is God the Savior, he is Christ the Lord, ever to be worshiped, trusted, and adored.”

Note the phrase “with bated breath.” It means with confidence, but not absolute certainty. But we can be, and are, really, really hopeful that this carpenter from Nazareth holds the answers to the great questions of life and death and, yes, new life with the Lord.

Our relationship with the Lord is all over the park, as it were. Our belief is strong, our experience is confirming, our hope is deep. Yet we can't be sure. Oh yes, we can be hopeful. We can be confident. We can be grateful. But we also live with bated breath. Assuming though that we must wait for a final answer, what better way to wait than with hope and confidence and, yes, thanksgiving?

So, here we are. Hopeful, reasonably confident, and grateful. This is the umbrella which we have chosen. Is there a better way to live than under this umbrella? I don't think so. Indeed it makes us want to express our thanksgiving. Maybe even by singing. Enter our hymnal.

No doubt, you have your favorites. One of mine – which we will sing at the conclusion of today's service - is #435 - At the **Name** of Jesus. One of the interesting features of this hymn is the person responsible for the lyrics. The author is Caroline Maria **Noel**.

“**Noel**”! Now that's curious. A coincidence? I don't think so. It seems rather a perfect fit. After all, **Noel** means “first news.” God was there at the beginning. And I wonder if God might have been there when Caroline wrote these lyrics. Stranger things have happened.

Yes, God works in mysterious ways. And you and I work in mysterious ways. Part of the time in clarity. And part of the time in mystery. And, yes, sometimes things come together. For you and me, in this setting, Jesus is the perfect fit. The Creator of the Universe in a form to whom we can relate. This is the Good News. It is what inspired Caroline Noel, and which inspires you and me.

Yes, indeed.

“Name him Christians, name him, with love strong as death,  
name with awe and wonder and with bated breath;  
he is God the Savior, he is Christ the Lord,  
ever to be worshiped, trusted and adored.”

Amen!