

What's in a name? Quite a bit it turns out. This morning in our readings we hear God called by several names: the Ancient One, the King, The Alpha and the Omega, and as if to explain what Alpha and Omega are, God is called, "He who is and was and who is to come", and God is called the LORD.

There's an interesting bit of history about the name LORD with all capital letters. You see it in our psalm today. Ever wondered why LORD is capitalized like that? Well, when it is used in this way it is actually a placeholder for a more important name that the Hebrews did not speak. Our ancestors thought that they would be struck dead if one spoke the name of God and so they called him Adonai instead (in English – LORD). God is the original "He who must not be named".

The word "God" was known by the ancient Hebrew people as four Hebrew Letters. We call it the tetragrammaton (because everything in theology has to have a fancy name). So the four Hebrew letters that God is known by are YHWH at least that's the closest we can come to it in our alphabet. That is unpronounceable, but if you put some vowels in between those consonants you get Yahweh. So all the places where you see LORD in capital letters (and that will only be in the Hebrew Scriptures) it is a place holder for YHWH or Yahweh.

So that is a name for God. What of the names for Jesus in our texts today? "Human being" is one name for Jesus if we understand Daniel's prophecy as pointing towards Christ. Some other names for Jesus that we heard read from Revelation are: Faithful Witness, First born of the Dead, and Ruler of the Kings of the Earth, each one full of significance and each a beautiful name and one that points to the Kingship of Jesus.

Looking at names in our Gospel reading from John, Pilate wants to know if Jesus' name is King. In this exchange that we heard today Pilate never calls Jesus by **any** name. Perhaps he doesn't know what to call him. He asks him, "Are you **the** King of the Jews?" Then after an

exchange in which Jesus will not be cornered Pilate asks, “So, are you **a** King?” Jesus answers, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.” Notice that Jesus doesn’t say yes, and he doesn’t say no.

Many of us don’t think so much of monarchs these days, and so the analogy of Christ as the ultimate King over all Kings might not hold so much power or importance to us. Monarchs, for the most part in our day are just figureheads. They keep our interest and curiosity, but not so much our respect.

Jesus himself doesn’t think too highly of Kings either. Kings in the days of Jesus and before him were not necessarily known for their benevolence and loving deeds for their people. They were known for conquering and slaying, and for making decrees that all must obey on pain of death. Certainly the people of Jesus’ day remember King David and his son, King Solomon fondly, but the scriptures are full of stories of the conquests and failings of these men too. Jesus certainly is not a King like any Pilate had ever seen. He tells Pilate that his Kingship is not of this world. He has no army that will come to fight to free him. In this way Jesus tells us what his kingdom is not, but he’s not so clear about what his Kingdom is. He only tells us that the Kingdom of God is where God’s truth rules. Jesus has come to testify to that truth.

So, why do we celebrate Christ the King Sunday with triumphal music and symbols of earthly kingship when Jesus himself seems to eschew the human idea of Kingship? What would Jesus say about all of this? Do we long for a monarch who will care for us, solve our problems? Surely the persecuted Christians for whom Revelation was written were longing for just that. The Caesars, Nero and Domitian, had persecuted Christians because Jesus as King-over-all threatened the sovereignty of Caesar who wished to be worshiped as emperor and god. The early Christians believed and hoped fervently that Christ the King would return soon, would conquer the bad guys once and for all, and would rule with justice.

However you and I feel about the images associated with Kingship, surely the rallying point for everyone, early Christians and modern Christians alike, is that what we want our King, our Christ, to be is the ruler of all our hearts, with the truth that he speaks to Pilate, and the love that he has for us.

One day last week I came in here and just stood in the dark in front of the stained glass windows, looking at each one, one at a time, to take them in and understand their symbolism. I'm sure I didn't see everything there is to see in these intricate and beautiful windows, but one thing stood out very clearly – there are a lot of crowns in our windows here. Look there and there and there. And further, there are a lot of castles, ramparts and towers that add to the image of Jesus as the King of the castle that is the Kingdom of God. If our church hadn't been named Trinity Church, it could well have been named Christ the King Episcopal Church.

From names for Jesus we now turn to our own names. I've been given a few names in my lifetime. Some of those names are beautiful like: daughter, friend, mother, but some of them have not been so beautiful. When I was a child on the playground I remember being called stupid, four-eyes, and metalmouth. I was taught a rhyme that was supposed to keep me from being hurt by those names. You know the rhyme, "Sticks and stones can break my bones but words will never hurt me." It might have been a help to say that rhyme to myself but because it's not true it didn't help a lot. It is unfortunate that we have had to learn as we mature that words, in the form of names and labels, can and do hurt.

Over time it seems like the ugly names stick with us more than do the beautiful names. So much so that when I do something wrong I use the bad names on myself. "Duh, you are such an idiot, such an idiot", I say to myself.

So I have given myself the name idiot and I might as well write it on a big sticky note and stick it right here on my forehead. Because that is what I am telling myself and the world about me when I think like that. We find those ugly names everywhere we turn, at home and at work, in

politics, in business and in sports. I wonder what names Coach Charlie Weis is being called today after the Fighting Irish lost to the UCONN Huskies yesterday.

Now, you and I have been given two perfectly good and beautiful names; one was given to us by our parents at birth, and shows how much they love us. Our given name helps to identify who we are. But the most important name that you and I have been given, which was given to us before we were even born, is “beloved child of God”. That name is **ultimately** who we are.

Today, Nina will be washed in the water of baptism. And through that water all the not-so-good names will be washed away and she will be named as she was at her birth, and therefore reminded, that she is Nina, beloved child of God. Nina, there is nothing you can do which will ever change that.

It is our privilege to witness Nina’s baptism, and as she is washed, remember that we have been washed clean too, remember that we have beautiful names that our parents and God have given us. Many people, including you and me, come to our Christian community with a lot of accumulated names, perhaps forehead full of sticky notes. And it is our job today and always to help each other know what our true name is.

Jesus, the King of Love, was washed in the Jordan River and named “Beloved” by God. Nina is named and washed in that name too. As I mark a cross on her forehead to remind her that she has Christ’s Spirit within her, remember to take the sticky note with some other name off of your head and take it off of the forehead of your neighbor too. Beloved is your name.