



Sunday January 17, 2021
John 1:43-51 (2nd Sunday After the Epiphany)

Pastor Christian Marien

The Name of Jesus

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. Amen.

The republic of Palau is a tiny island closer to Indonesia than the United States. It was a US territory and gained its full sovereignty in 1994. Why the geography lesson, you ask? Well, it turns out when the US Capitol building was overrun by a mostly white mob, that the blue flag with yellow sun of the country of Palau was visible being held up in the midst of the mob. The President of Palau was horrified and took to social media and news outlets to decry the use and presence of the flag in the mob. Taking a page out of the Palauan president's playbook, I too want to decry the use and presence of a flag in the midst of the mob. Only this flag did not belong to any one country. This flag claimed the name of my Savior. The name of Jesus. I was struck by the flag, saddened that it was present in such a shameful moment for our country – saddened still more for the use of the name of Jesus to seemingly promote anger, hate, destruction, division, and death. Words and actions that are not a part of the Bible I read or the Savior I follow or the actions I offer to the glory of God.

I decided I needed a refresher on what the name of Jesus actually stands for and offers to the world. This is what I found. In Matthew, Chapter 1: *"She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."* From Philippians, Chapter 2: *"Therefore, God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should 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."* In John, Chapter 14: *"I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son."* In the book of Proverbs, Chapter 18: *"The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run into it and are safe."* From the book of Acts, Chapter 4: *"There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved."* In John, Chapter 14: *"If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it."* And finally, from Matthew, Chapter 18: *"For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."* This is what the name of Jesus means to me.

The name of Jesus saves.

The name of Jesus is to be worshipped.

The name of Jesus is to be uttered as a prayer.

The name of Jesus offers protection.

The name of Jesus is an open door to eternal life.

The name of Jesus gathers us together.

So now what? Well, Wednesday, January 6th, was not the first time the name of Jesus was used in defense of or to assist in the efforts of destruction, division, and death. And Wednesday, January 6th, will not be the last time the name of Jesus will be used to diminish, dismiss, or divide groups of people. Although I am a big fan of the reading from John today – as we hear Jesus calling Phillip and Nathaniel as disciples and hear Nathaniel claim Jesus as the Son of God, I do believe the Holy Spirit is leading me in a different direction.

Today, honestly, I am more interested in a different chapter of the book of John. Chapter 8:31. *"Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, 'If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.' They answered him, 'We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, 'You will be made free?'"*

I am struck by the forgetfulness of the Jews. Claiming they have never been slaves denies all their history of oppression under the Egyptians and denies the burden of the religious laws and customs of the temple and religious structure that has kept them bound to serving a God that can never be satisfied. With the birth of Jesus,

the entire landscape changes. As God comes to us, sharing a message of love and eternal life, the blinded eyes of those who can only imagine an angry God are made new and opened to the promise of being in relationship with God who is in love with us.

I am struck by our own forgetfulness too. Claiming that we too are the beacon on the hill, a light to the nations, a nation built on the idea that all men are created equal. It is a noble aspiration. But my friends, if Wednesday, January 6th taught us anything, it is a reminder that we have a long way to go on the journey toward full inclusion and equity for all people in this nation. A long way to go before the vision of God's Kingdom on earth comes to full realization where the dignity and value of each person is honored and treasured above all other needs. We forget the history of a nation that has continued to learn to be better than our history explains. We are a work in progress. Some days inspiring the world. Other days painfully confessing our sinfulness and inability to remember where we have come from. And so, on this Sunday, as we hear the call of Jesus to Nathaniel and Phillip, it is my prayer that we, too, will hear the call of Jesus in our own hearts to follow in the footsteps of our Savior. To speak the name of Jesus in prayer and praise as we look to gather all people together. We have much work to do to realize and, in some cases, even begin to recognize the vision of God's Kingdom here on Earth. And that work – at least for me – so often begins with prayer and confession trusting in God's promise of forgiveness and guidance.

Let us pray.

Holy God, from whose eyes the measure of our faith is not hidden, who calls each of us by name to be the church, give us love enough to make a difference, give us vision enough to follow, give us endurance enough to hold steadfast in the face of the unholy. Bless us now and touch us with your holiness that we might have commitment enough to be good new to the poor. Comfort those who cry in dark corners; the lonely, the strangers, the weary, the fearful, the disappointed, the anxious, the depressed, the forsaken, the dispirited, the grieving, the sick, and those who suffer pain. Open our eyes to those around us who scream in science the depth of their despair. Break open hardened hearts to the tenderness of your care. Fire us with justice that we might proclaim freedom to the captives. Lord God, listen to our confession and prayer.

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, have mercy on us.

Holy God, we pray for miracles for the powerless. For the hungry that we might share our bread. For the homeless that we will open the doors of our hearts and let your wandering people in. Have mercy on those who must live out their lives enslaved to someone else because of race or politics or economics or faith. Loose our bonds that we might risk our won securities on their behalf. God of peace – give us your peace – to our hearts, to our nation, and to our world. Lord God listen to our confession and prayer.

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, have mercy on us.

People of God, this day, and every day, it is my confession, my prayer, and my praise to God. I speak Jesus. Amen.