

Monday, November 2

Kristine Wallace (2010)

When we are baptized, we are named, and then baptized in God's name. Our church is named "Christ the King". Some of the passages in the Bible that mean a great deal to me concern names.

In Genesis 32:24-30 Jacob wrestles with a 'man' and won't let him go unless he blesses him. "So he said to him, 'What is your name?' And he said, 'Jacob'. Then he said, 'You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed.' Then Jacob asked him, 'Please tell me your name.' But he said, 'Why is it that you ask my name?' And there he blessed him." Jacob receives a new name ["God strives" or "the one who strives with God"], but his polite request remains unanswered.



From my study of Greek and Roman history, I know that it was important in prayer to address the deity with the right name. A Roman prayer ends: "or by whatever other name it is lawful to name you". We find a similar concern in Exodus 3 when Moses encounters God at the burning bush. "But Moses said to God, 'If I come to the Israelites and say to them, "The God of your ancestors has sent me to you," and they ask me, "What is his name?" what shall I say to them?' God said to Moses: 'I AM WHO I AM.' He said further, 'Thus you shall say to the Israelites, "I AM has sent me to you."' (Exodus 3:13-14) The Jewish Publication Society's Tanakh translation gives the Hebrew: "And God said to Moses, "Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh." He continued, "Thus shall you say to the Israelites, 'Ehyeh sent me to you.'" (Exodus 3:14) Various English translations of this name are possible: I Am That I Am; I Am Who I Am; I Will Be What I Will Be, but it is rendered respectfully in our Bibles, "LORD".

What strikes me, however, is that God's name, unlike the names of other ancient deities (Zeus=sky; Hera=lady), is not a noun, but a verb, a first person verb. This implies relationship, the covenant relationship with Israel and our relationship as children of God. Since the Hebrew verb form can express present time, I AM WHAT/WHO I AM gives us strong assurance: God is an ever-living presence on which we can rely in all our joys and sorrows, times of faith and times of doubt. God is stable, but his name also reveals that God is not static. I find implicit in "I WILL BE WHAT/WHO I WILL BE" God's incarnation in Jesus Christ and God's Holy Spirit poured out on all of us.

The gospel writers wrestled with this name issue. Matthew and Luke may allude to the Jacob/Israel story when they recount how Joseph by an angel in a dream (Matthew 1:21) and Mary by an angel in person (Luke 1:31) were told: "you are to name him Jesus"/"you will name him Jesus" [Gk. Iesous; Heb. Yehoshua= "the Lord saves"]. The gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke report that, like the pagans concerned about the proper name for a deity, people were uncertain what to call this extraordinary person: John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets? (Mark 8:28; Matthew 16:14; Luke 9:19). Despite his significant given name, Jesus then asks the disciples a pointed question: "But who do you say that I am?" (Mark 8:29; Matthew 16:15; Luke 9:20) Peter has the answer: "You are the Messiah", but as happens later, Peter does not really understand what he has said.

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In his gospel, John omits this incident or perhaps applies it to John the Baptist (1:19-23). Instead, we are brought back to that mysterious name of God, with the “I am” sayings. Jesus says, “I am the bread of life” (6:35), “I am the light of the world” (8:12), “I am the good shepherd” (10:11; cf. also 10:7; 11:25-26; 14:6; 15:1). These help us understand God, but do not limit or restrict who God is. For John also reveals that Jesus makes a direct connection with the divine name: “Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am” (8:58; cf. 6:20; 8:24, 28; 13:19; 18:5, 6, 8). Jesus is God, not of the past of Roman Judea, but of all time: I AM/I WILL BE.

I have wrestled with the name of our church, Christ the King. We declare Jesus is Christ/Messiah and King. I need to recognize and ponder how the life, death and resurrection of Jesus painfully and wonderfully redefined those words. I also need to remind myself daily that, to modernize the regal metaphor, God is Number One, I am not. “Christ the King” reminds me to love and serve God first, then my neighbor, and then myself.

Tuesday, November 3

Courtney Webb (2020)

As I walk the halls of the hospital during the day and the streets of the neighborhood where I live at night, I find myself repeatedly reciting and finding comfort in these Godly Play words: “They could only go forward and they did.”

A year ago this week, I completed a chaplain residency programs at Children’s Hospital in Dallas, my husband completed his graduate program, and we moved to Houston seeking new jobs, a new home, and new community. It has been a full year of transition, of learning, of struggle, and of finding new ways to trust God in the midst of it all.



The guiding words I share above come from the Godly Play story “Second Creation: The Falling Apart.” Even the story title seems fitting, as it often feels like many things as we used to know them are “falling apart.” We find ourselves in an in-between place, a liminal space, a global pandemic space, where we don’t know what the journey ahead holds; and yet, we know that our daily lives are experiencing so many differences. We know that we cannot go back to when it was all together (AKA pre-Covid). Jerome’s language of the end of this Godly Play story continue to guide my feet and my heart as I imagine God journeying with me as we each learn how to create a new future out of all of these differences. Spoiler alert – here’s my favorite part from the end of the story:

“The differences also did something wonderful. Now Adam and Eve could take things apart and put them back together again. They could be creators, almost like God. They couldn’t make something out of nothing, but they could make something out of the differences. After the differences, Adam and Eve could not go back to when everything was all together in the Garden. They could only go forward and they did.

God sent Adam and Eve out of the Garden. An angel and a sword was put at the edge of the Garden so they could not go back, but only go forward. God went with them on their journey to help them be the best creators they could be, and to be with God in this new way, and to stay one with God.” (Jerome Berryman, Godly Play, Volume 6, 30).

My prayer is that these words are as empowering for you as they are for me. We are daily absorbing and moving through an incredible amount of differences. And yet, I wonder what it looks like to lean into the freedom of co-creating something new with God? When I find myself waiting and wishing to go back to a previous time in life, a previous job, a pre-Covid time, it is easy to sink into a place of despair. I wonder what might happen if we stop waiting for normal to come back again? I wonder what could happen if we lean into the truth that God goes with us and that we can “only go forward.” I wonder what might happen if we stay curious about how we can take things apart and put them back together again in new ways? I wonder how a present moment and forward-facing mindset can renew hope for the future and help us to continue to make-meaning?

Creator God, inspire us with the knowledge deep within our beings that you journey with us and that you are doing something wonderful with all these differences. Amen.

Wednesday, November 4

Wendy Wentland (1995)

Compline

This, one of the daily offices practiced and treasured by the Church for eons of time. The gift of today has been granted and lived, with all its quietude or lack, successes and failures, blessings and seeming curses. And here we are at day's end, minds crowded with unanswered thoughts and unresolved issues. Light has changed to dusk, shadows creep from every corner and behind everything. Only the sky bears remnants of glimmer, lavender and peach hues losing their brilliance to soft, then dull grey. Trees and shrubs rustle no more. Be still and know that I am God.



Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ~Matthew 11:28

Be present, O merciful God, and protect us through the hours of this night, so that we who are wearied by the changes and chances of this life may rest in your eternal changelessness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. *The Book of Common Prayer*

Thursday, November 5

Wendy and Nathan Wiker (2012)

*Let streams of living justice flow down upon the earth;
Give freedom's light to captives, let all the poor have
worth.
The hungry's hands are pleading, the workers claim their
rights,
The mourners long for laughter, the blinded seek for
sight.
Make liberty a beacon, strike down the iron power;
Abolish ancient vengeance, proclaim your people's hour.
~Let Streams of Living Justice, ELW 710*



We've always loved this hymn, both for the beautiful melody and for the message. The message and resultant action is also one that has led to our greatest fulfillment and joy at Christ the King. Whether it's been through our long involvement with the Feed the Homeless ministry, our current involvement with Christian Community Service Center, or the various human rights issues that Christ the King has marched or demonstrated for, we are thankful for the opportunity to show compassion and advocate for justice for those oppressed or without the resources or privilege that most of us at Christ the King take for granted. As choir members and one of us being a lifelong "high" church Lutheran, we absolutely adore the music, liturgy, and theology of Christ the King, but it's the most simple of all commands: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," that illuminates this hymn and our faith journey. All people have worth. All people deserve equal rights. And all people deserve Christ's and our love—full stop, without judgment.

Dear God, we know that we fall short in loving our neighbor as ourselves and are guilty of being selfish with our resources and take our privilege for granted. We pray that we are given the strength, time, energy, and means to do all we can to help and ensure justice for the vulnerable and oppressed. Thank you for sending your Only Son to show us the way, and let us further this compassion for those most in need and therefore deserving of this love. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Friday, November 6

Irmi Willcockson (1991)

*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.
~ Psalm 119:105*

Yes, I jumped on the bullet journal wagon. Probably later than many, judging by the sheer number of pins on pinterest, supplies at local crafts stores, and how to videos. So, I'm not unique, but my journal is uniquely mine. I've found it particularly helpful for my faith life. I reserve two pages each month for devotions, changing the color I use with the church seasons. A short note summarizing the reading, a prayer, an insight, a call to action. Since this is a journal and not a diary, some days there is no entry. Building the habit of (daily) devotions has become more important as my path has meandered, or I find myself suddenly on an entirely different path.



Holy God, use your word to light my path, help me see where you would have me go. Amen.

Saturday, November 7

Katherine Willcockson (2016)

*Shepherd me, O God, beyond my wants, beyond my fears,
from death into life.*

I think that each person in Christ the King's congregation has experienced a time in their life when things didn't go as planned. Whether through an untimely death, a sick family member, or a lost job, we all know the feeling of being thrown off the train tracks of life that we thought we were securely fastened to. For me, this jolt came in the form of mental illness. I thought that I had distanced myself from the world completely, and I had tried to remove my faith from my life as well, thinking that God has truly stopped helping me in any way. When I was admitted to a psych hospital, the idea that I was still a member of Christ the King had left my mind. My fellow church members did not forget, though. The first time that my parents asked if someone from church could come and visit me, I was taken aback. I could not imagine that they would want to see me in such a dismal place. But, as often as time allowed for, Deacon Ben Remmert, my youth pastor, came to visit me and give me communion. Pastor Liebster also visited to talk with me. Haley Goodrow took the time to choose a book and send it to me as reading material to pass the time. Upon arriving back at my house, I saw flowers from other fellow church members sitting in vases around the house. I had tried to push God and my faith community out of my life because I felt that God could not love someone like me. But, Ben reminded me that God's love for me had never wavered. Pastor Liebster comforted me in allowing me to share my thoughts about faith and validating them. Haley sent me love and acceptance in the form of a book to read. My fellow church members encouraged me to return to church by showing me that they had never forgotten about me or loved me less. Although I felt I was lost beyond hope, I remembered that I was still one of God's children – one of his sheep. And, as he does for all of his sheep who have wandered astray, he led me back. A favorite hymn of mine – *Shepherd Me, O God*, ELW 780 – became perpetually stuck in my head when I returned home from the hospital, and it served as my reminder that I will never stray too far from God.



Shepherd me, O God, beyond my wants, beyond my fears, from death into life. Amen.

Sunday, November 8

Anna Fay Williams (1989)

So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. ~Matthew 6:34



In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus admonishes us to first look to the Lord and his righteousness, and further instructs us about our worries.

With the current events we have more than enough worry to go around: the corona virus, the resolution of long injustices on racial issues, and the evidences of climate change on our food supplies and weather. With the corona virus pandemic, we hear forecasts that are confusing and seem to paralyze us in comprehending our future in “the new normal.”

In my early childhood, I often worried about our future. My mother was a worrier. When I was about ten years old she kept me home from a class outing because she feared a school bus accident. For years, she worried about tornadoes and incessantly called for me to take cover. Later in my life, she begged me to cancel a trip to Mexico where I was speaking at a solar energy conference because she feared I would be kidnapped.

When my own life was in shambles, my worries included the loss of a business with no job in sight. Though I was constant in my faith, I only wanted a restoration of what I had known. But one day, I dropped at the bedside and prayed to God for help. No sooner than I exhausted my prayers, the phone rang. A blessed voice asked, “When can you come to Houston to work for us?” The offer came from an engineering firm where I had interviewed but had given up hope after not hearing from them.

Ironically, my new responsibilities were in forecasting conditions in the oil industry. Eventually, other positions led to forecasting in banking, real estate and health care. As I studied the forecasting models, I realized that outcomes were driven by the early underlying assumptions but that it is difficult to fully comprehend the “troubles of the day” in a comprehensive manner and to consider their relevance to the future. There may be an unknown factor like Covid-19 that completely upends any forecast.

Personally, at the time of my prayers, I could not have predicted a future in Houston, a marriage to a wonderful husband Tom Williams, completing a doctorate in health sciences,, and my religious life at Christ the King Lutheran Church. When I hear the dire predictions about the coronavirus, I must rest on my faith. I am assured that there will be a future that requires the best decisions that I can make for today. My prayer is that I do so in a careful and considerate manner and marshal the resources that the Lord provides for us as promised in Matthew 6:33. Then, too, I can’t help but remember a few lines from Bobby McFerrin’s popular song, “Don’t Worry, Be Happy.”

In every life we have some trouble
But when you worry you make it double
Don’t worry, be happy
Don’t worry, be happy now