

Homily – Pentecost – I Know You By Name

Rob Keim

June 9, 1019 – St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church

One of the best practices we follow here at St. Barnabas is that each of you receives a hand written name tag as you arrive to church on Sunday morning. Yes, vestry members have pre-made name tags, and I don't think I have ever worn a name tag, but almost everyone receives and wears a hand written name tag. And yes, it means we have to have ushers who are bold enough to admit when they don't know someone's name.

In the past twenty years I have been part of seven parishes, and I think hand written names tags are wonderful. Premade name tags can be good, but it establishes two classes of people, those who have been regular enough to get a premade name tag, and those who are not. Two classes of people are not what we are about, at least not what we are about when we are at our best.

Now, if you are like me, then you are less likely to talk to someone if you don't know a person's name. Especially, if you are supposed to know their name. Perhaps you have been told a person's name multiple times, but the name just hasn't stuck in your memory. Or again, if you are like me, sometimes your brain has cross referenced a person to an incorrect name, and you have a hesitation before saying a name. For some, reason I have incorrectly crossed our bishop-elect's name. I keep wanting to call her "Yvonne" even though I know quite well her name is "Lucinda." Lucinda, Lucinda, Lucinda her name is Lucinda.

So, if you are like me you are more likely to interact with someone if you know their name. At our best, our churches make it easier for us to interact with one another. That is what we want to do, and that is why we use handmade name tags.

Knowing someone's name is just one example of a way that it can be easier or harder to interact with another person and make them feel welcomed and even loved.

Having a common language and a common culture are two other ways that interaction can be made easier or harder. And, today we have our annual celebration of Pentecost, that event two thousand years ago in history in which the Holy Spirit of God allowed the early followers of Jesus to cross languages and cultures.

A few minutes ago we heard the story of Pentecost read to us. *“When the day of Pentecost had come, the disciples were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.... And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.”*

As the early followers of Jesus gathered there was a noise so loud that it could not be ignored. So startled were they that they lost control of themselves. Their sensory systems were flooded with adrenaline so that their minds and bodies processed intensely the sound, energy, and feeling of the coming of the Holy Spirit. She had come as Jesus had promised, and it was an experience rather than something cognitive. All of those present were filled with the Holy Spirit. None were excluded.

What does it mean when human beings fluently speak languages they do not know and that native speakers recognize what is being said?

I have to say, that is a super power that I would like to have. Just like that day two thousand years ago, I would like to be multi-lingual and multi-cultural, and I wish our church was that way as well.

If you have attended any diocesan events in the last ten years, then you will have seen that those worship services are never just in one language. There is at least English and Spanish, and sometimes there is Tagalog, one

of the languages of the Philippines. Bishop Mary has been persistent in pushing us to be multi-lingual and multi-cultural.

And, the need to be multi-lingual and multi-cultural was something that was frequently talked about during the Bishop Search process. Here in the south County of San Luis Obispo, we are still more than sixty percent Caucasian or Anglo, however, in the Silicon Valley Bay Area it is only forty-six percent. We all know that the beauty of California encompasses people of many languages and cultures. Is it any wonder that our Bishop-elect, Lucinda, was the most multi-cultural and multi-lingual of our five candidates. Lucinda grew up in Perú and speaks fluent Spanish.

Now, the Holy Spirit is calling us as individuals and as a community of God to be welcoming and invitational to those in the community around us. And, following the example of Jesus, we are not just welcoming and invitational to those that are already like us. God's love encompasses all, and our love should as well.

A few weeks ago, the New York Times Magazine cover story was about the famous travel Guide, Rick Steves. The title of the article was "Rick Steves wants to set you free one international vacation at a time."

Although Steves has published many foreign-language phrase books, the only language he speaks fluently is English. He built his business in America, raised his kids in America and gives frequent loving praise to the glories of American life.

Nevertheless, Rick Steves desperately wants you to leave America, for he believes that the tiniest exposure to the outside world will change your entire life.

In the article Steves says that travel will "wallop your ethnocentricity" and "carbonate your experience" and "rearrange your cultural furniture." Like sealed windows on a hot day, a nation's borders can be stultifying. Steves wants to crack them open, to let humanity's breezes circulate. The more rootedly American you are, the more Rick Steves wants this for you. If you

have never had a passport, if you are afraid of the world, if your family would prefer to vacation exclusively at Disney World, if you worry that foreigners are rude and predatory and prone to violence or at least that their food will give you diarrhea, then Steves wants you — especially you — to go to Europe. Then he wants you to go beyond. (For a majority of his audience, Steves says, “Europe is the wading pool for world exploration.”)

As the English writer G.K. Chesterton once put it: “The whole object of travel is not to set foot on foreign land; it is at last to set foot on one’s own country as a foreign land.”

Rick Steves says, After looking at a Roman stone wall topped by a Saxon stone wall topped by a medieval English wall next to a modern paved street, I began to see what a thin crust of national history the United States actually stands on. I began to realize how silly and narrow our notion of exceptionalism is — this impulse to consider ourselves somehow immune to the forces that shape the rest of the world. Steves says, the environment I grew up in, with its malls and freeways, its fantasies of heroic individualism, began to seem unnatural. I started to sense how much reality exists elsewhere in the world — not just in a theoretical sense, in books and movies, but with the full urgent weight of the real. And not just in Europe but on every other continent as well.

In his book, “Travel as a Political Act,” Rick Steves writes, “I’m unapologetically proud to be an American. The happiest day of any trip is the day I come home. ... But other nations have some pretty good ideas too.” Steves insists that a world in crisis needs more travel, not less.

Travel, to Steves, is not some frivolous luxury — it is an engine for improving humankind, for connecting people and removing their prejudices, for knocking distant cultures together to make unlikely sparks of joy and insight.

And, part of that insight is that we do not need to fear those things and people that are from another language and a different culture. They too

are the beloved of God. We can embrace the broader beauty and not just the beauty we already know.

Beatrice Bruteau wrote, "If we cannot love our neighbor as ourself, it is because we do not perceive our neighbor as ourself." Travel helps us overcome this shortcoming.

When we are unable to see that we are in communion with another, then ultimately, our lack of understanding turns back toward us in violence and distrust of other cultures and fear of diversity.

Our world sorely needs the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We need to see the connections we have. Even if we cannot BE multi-lingual and multi-cultural, we need to support it as a goal. We need to see and embrace the beauty that is not yet our own.

Historically, we have said that the United States, this most Christian of nations, is a melting pot. Over time new immigrants melt into the culture and language of America. They are assimilated, and by a second or third generation are unrecognizable from "normal" Americans, whatever that is.

In the last few decades another metaphor has come alongside the melting pot metaphor. This is the salad bowl. America is like a salad bowl. In a salad each of the component parts complement each other in taste, and smell and color. However, a carrot is still a carrot, and a tomato is still a tomato. In a salad bowl the parts do not melt together, they remain distinct and identifiable. So, if America is like a salad bowl it means that an immigrant may keep and maintain the beauty that they bring with them. It means African Americans don't need to assimilate their own identity and culture. A salad bowl means that we see beauty in keeping diversity rather than eliminating it.

This is the message that I want to share with you today on this day of Pentecost. Our churches are at their best when we know each other by name. We are also at our best when we see and embrace the beauty that is not yet our own. Through the gifts of the Holy Spirit the early followers

of Jesus were able to overcome differences, and if we let it, the Holy Spirit can help us overcome differences as well. It is all beautiful.