

Give It Up!**Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16 Mark 8:31-38**

The changing of a person's name occurs often throughout scripture. In Genesis often names or new names have significant meanings – for example Adam = “human” Eve = “living” referring to her being the Mother of all, . Today's scripture has “Abram” which means “exalted Father” becoming “Abraham” or “Father of a multitude” and “Sarai” which means either “princess” or “argumentative” becomes “Sarah” and gains a nuance meaning “the source of nations and kings.” Names often are changed or in scripture when people enter a covenant with God, or a new relationship with one another. In the Gospels, Jesus often gives names to his disciples with spiritual significance. Jesus renames Simon “Peter” – the “rock.” the steady disciple. Jesus renames the brothers, James and John “Boanerges” or sons of thunder. Because of their fervent and powerful work of spreading the gospel. Of course we also change names in our culture when we get married, and we even have a specific ritual for naming a child in baptism, both of which signify a change in or entrance into the community. The idea of a new name is imaged by John in his vision of the end of time. In the Revelation of John, Jesus is quoted as saying, “Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it.” The ability to name or give a new name to someone is powerful. Naming something often defines it. For example a single person might be named with the words “terrorist” and “freedom fighter” depending upon the namer's perspective in a political revolution. We see by God and Jesus' example in scripture that the giving of a name or the changing of a name are serious and important events in our relationships to God, one another and even ourselves.

So it is with some shock that we hear Jesus say, “Get behind me, Satan,” to his close disciple and friend, Simon-Peter. But Jesus is not saying Simon-Peter is Satan, but

rather that Peter speaks the most difficult temptation that Jesus and all the disciples will face... and that is the temptation to give up the mission – the one God has given to Jesus - and choose instead the path of self preservation. The temptation is for Jesus to go along to get along and not risk his life. The controversial movie, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, highlights paints this temptation for Jesus to choose the path of life as a regular Hebrew man in the midst of the Roman Empire very clearly.

At first I was confused about the pairing of the renaming of Abram and Sarai with this gospel, but as I thought about it I realized it points out a very hard truth that those who get new names face. To fully receive a new name or promise of God, we have to give up our old name as a promise to give up old ways... particularly the old way of self-preservation. Jesus in teaching the disciples after his tiff with Simon-Peter says, “If the Realm of God is the most important thing, you must be willing to give up everything else to attain it... even your life if necessary.

This is hard thing to face. We are genetically programmed to survive at all costs, to go fight or flight to survive is what humanity had done since the beginning. But Jesus says we must give up that totally consuming human drive to survive for a higher calling, Jesus tells us there is more to life than survival of oneself.

The great writer and philosopher Voltaire once said, “Good is the enemy of great.” in his teaching Jesus says that no matter how good life is – the wonder of human love and nature and the beauty of a sunset - that the great, the life of service to God, is more full and rich than life itself and so we must be willing to give up our life if necessary to attain the great. Often we only think of Jesus working with those who need healing and forgiveness and this is a big part of his ministry, but Jesus also sought to make good people into great people. The turning of fishers into disciples who “turn the world upside down” shows how successful he was at this part of his ministry.

One of the goals of Lent is to look at our lives and make sure we are living as we

truly want. To do that we look at what we are doing, - both finding ways we are giving into unhealthy or unhelpful habits, and by wondering if there are ways we may be letting the good keep us from the great. One of the most challenging quotes from Marianne Williamson's Course in Miracles puts it this way, "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people will not feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone and as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give others permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

Jesus challenges us to be like those first disciples, to be great – Oh, we will not be perfect, far from it, but we can be people that turn the world upside down like they were. But to do that we must be willing to give up the unhelpful and sometimes even the good, we must be willing to risk everything in order to gain the Way, the Truth and the Life! One other naming Jesus does is to name his disciples not as servants, but friends. This is as true today in the Year of Our Lord Anno Domini 2015 as it was when he first said it. Jesus does not want followers who obey him in quiet servitude because of who he is, but rather friends - sisters and brothers who will join him – walk beside him in the mission of making God's reality come to life in this world of trouble and fear. And so as friends we are invited to sit at table with Jesus, to join him in a feast of joy and justice, healing and love, not as servants but as full children of the One True God.

On that Passover so long ago, Jesus took the bread, and after giving thanks

He broke it saying this is my body broken for you, do this in remembrance of me.

Then after supper he took the Elijah Cup, reserved for the one who would come to announce the coming of God's realm into the world and after giving thanks

He said this cup is the new promise written in my blood

As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you remember me until I come again.

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16 17When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. 2And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous." 3Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, 4"As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. 5 No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. 6I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. 7I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you 15God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. 16I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her."

Mark 8:31-38 31Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. 32He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

34He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. 36For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? 37Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? 38Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."