

Peter Wiley
 John 1:35-42
 Hudson
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INTRODUCTION:

Our Gospel lesson this morning focuses on the calling of the first disciples. This passage has always intrigued me.

- It intrigues me because all Jesus does is tell them to come and see . . . and they do it. It makes me wonder what they saw in him.
- And it intrigues me because I love the way Jesus took Simon and renamed him Cephas, he renamed him Petros or Peter. All words for rock. He told Simon he would be called Rock – firm, immovable, unshakable. The strength and faith upon which the church would be built.

If you read through the Gospels, you'll find Simon Peter to be a bit of a bumbler. He was the kid in the front row who couldn't help but try to answer every question. You can see him trying to hold himself back – but he can't. But he didn't always think things through. And he got a lot of it wrong. But he kept trying.

Well, Jesus told him he was a rock. I wonder how that must have felt to a guy who kept falling on his face. To be called a rock was a sign of real confidence – a sign that Jesus saw something in him that he didn't even see himself.

SCRIPTURE: The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon, son of John. You are to be called Cephas." (which is translated Peter).

Names . . . they seem to change every day. Isn't anything sacred anymore? Progressive Field? What's that? No more Jake . . . Jacob's Field was a great name. Remember when the Gund became Quicken Loans Arena? Shorten that to the "Q" . . . and that works.

But I don't think we want to shorten Progressive like that!

How much is a name worth? Apparently 3.6 million dollars a year or 58 million for 16 years. That's a whole lot of money for a name. Of course that's nothing compared to Shea Stadium. CitiBank will pay 400 million for name rights to their new stadium.

. . . and let's be honest . . . the truth is, it's only been the Jake for 14 years. It's not like Wrigley Field in Chicago that's had its great name since 1926. Wrigley would never do something so crass as to be sold for advertising rights. Right. Wrigley gum. Maybe it's nothing new.

Still, it's sad to see the loss of the Jake. Maybe they'll call it "The Pro." Pro-Field's got a good ring to it. Name's do matter . . . why else would they pay so much for it.

How would you feel to have Jesus call you by name? What do you think he'd call you? Names matter – a lot. To be named is to be known. No longer invisible.

What's your name?

You've got a family name.

Mine (Wiley), was first found in Dumfriesshire, Scotland.

Most of my roots are German, but my name makes me think I'm a Scot.

Knowing our history shapes us. Growing up I remember learning my family story. About braumeisters who came over from Germany. About run-ins with the law during prohibition. And about bigger-than-life family figures who did amazing things. Those stories helped shaped who I thought I should become. Later . . . when I learned that some of the stories were less than true and some simply made up, it didn't really matter. They were still a part of family lore and still told me about my identity. They still hold truth and shape my being.

Names matter. Do you remember that old childhood comeback, *Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me?* It's not true. Names hurt more. I remember being hit in the face as a kid and it paled in comparison to being called a name or taunted. In this presidential election the name calling, smearing and slander has just begun. And it hurts everyone. Get hold of the person's name and you have enormous control to shape him or her.

Think of it. When Moses asked God his name back in Exodus, God said YHWH. A word with no vowels so it couldn't be spoken. And a name that seems to be derived from the Hebrew verb: *to be*. So God answered saying: *I am what I am* or *I will be who I will be*. In other words, God's name couldn't be said. *Why?* Well I guess it's because once you know somebody's name you've got some claim over them. To have somebody's name means you hold some power over them.

That's what we hear back in Exodus. But then in the gospels God comes to us *with* a name. God comes to us as Jesus. Known. In human form. Accessible. And God in Jesus took Simon and not only knew his name, he gave him another: *Cephas, Petros, or Peter* – the rock upon whom the church would be built. And that name meant Simon Peter was not only named, he was claimed as one of God's own. And that name gave him a sense of purpose and an identity

To feel unknown, anonymous and nameless is painful. It's a sadness found in a transient community like ours where we often don't even know our next-door neighbors by name. An aloneness that often comes with the death of a spouse or in divorce where a major piece of identity and connectedness disappear overnight. It's a loss of a sense of self that can come with the loss of a job. Pains that can be worse than a physical blow. To all that, God says, "No." God says you've always got a name. God says you're named and claimed by me.

That's exactly what we (will say) said about Izaac when we baptized him this morning. That he is known, named and claimed by God. That's a pretty bold thing to say.

Dee told me that when she was a counselor at Temple Hills Camp last summer she wrote messages in soap on the bathroom mirror for the campers in her cabin to see each morning. They were reminders of who the kids are. Things like;

"Jesus loves me" with an arrow pointing back at their face.

"You are my beloved child with whom I am well pleased."

"For God so loves you, that he gave his only son."

All clear statements that they each have a name and are known and loved. The world may not always know you . . . but God does. We can't give those reminders too often.

Somebody else told me about how she writes messages in her child's baloney when she makes his lunch for school. Reminders that he is known and loved.

Those messages hold huge power. It makes me wonder what imprint we leave on our children each morning and at nighttime when they go to bed. It makes me wonder what messages we give our friends and loved ones. Do we make it clear that we know their names? That they are loved?

And yet it's even more important to know ourselves. To know who we believe ourselves to be. Who are you? It does matter how we see ourselves.

What's your identity? A lot of names we may have for ourselves don't stand the test of time. I used to see myself as really fit. I could run and not feel winded. Swim for an hour and still feel fresh and new. On Friday I went swimming at LifeCenter and after four laps I couldn't go any further. Some things change. If our sense of self is wrapped up in our looks . . . try as we might, they *will* change. If identity is found in your job . . . just one bad day can shatter it. Or if you see yourself as primarily a parent . . . just one melt down can ruin your sense of self.

I think that was part of Simon Peter's problem. He saw himself as the rock. Talk about intense pressure – the one upon whom the whole church would be built. No wonder he was crushed each time he failed to live up to his name. I think it was only when he realized that his true name – that his full sense of identity wasn't wrapped up in being the rock – that he was able to live as the rock he was meant to be. It was only after he learned that first and foremost he was a beloved child of God. He was the one for whom God gave his only Son. More than anything else . . . he was simply and purely loved.

Imagine if when we asked ourselves who we are, what a difference that would make if the first thing that came to mind was: *I am a child of God. I am the one for whom God gave his only Son.* It's a message we can't hear often enough.

I am a child of God.

The one for whom God gave his only son.

Yes . . . that's who you are.