12-25-16 Christmas Day Rev. Amy Haines

Isaiah 9:2-7 Names of Jesus

What names are you known by this morning? Sure, there is your first name. Yet how many of you are known by a nickname or use your middle name? How many of you are more often addressed by your title? (Mrs, Mr, Miss, Rev, Dr) How many of you are known more by your family relationship? (Mom, Dad, Aunt, Uncle, Grandma, Grandpa, Nana, Papa) All of us are known by a variety of names throughout our lives.

In the classic Christmas film Miracle on 34th Street there is this famous exchange concerning names.

District Attorney: What is your name?

Kris Kringle: Kris Kringle.

District Attorney: Where do you live?

Kris Kringle: That’s what this hearing will decide.

Judge Henry X. Harper: A very sound answer, Mister Kringle.

District Attorney: Do you really believe that you’re Santa Claus?

Kris Kringle: Of course.

District Attorney: [long pause] The state rests, your honor.

Is the kindly old gentleman, Kris Kringle, really Santa Claus? That’s the ongoing mystery at the heart of this film. It’s all about his name. --“Friending Jesus” 12-24-09 homileticsonline.com adapted

By what names do we know Jesus?

In the conference room there is a poster with the title “And He Shall Be Called”. It then lists 52 different names for Jesus, ending with Jesus Christ. In the New Testament there is over 100 different names for Jesus. And each name describes a different aspect of Jesus’ character. If you want a new trivia game, see how many names your family can say within a certain amount of time.

Consider the names of Jesus we have already heard proclaimed by angels during the season of Advent.

to Joseph- Jesus, Emmanuel; to Mary- Son of the Most High; to the Shepherds-Savior, Messiah, Lord

Today we hear the prophet Isaiah proclaim 4 more names that have been used to describe Jesus. If you are musical you may hear them in your mind to the tune from Handel’s Messiah. They are:

Wonderful Counselor

Mighty God

Everlasting Father

Prince of Peace

Originally these names were not meant as names for Jesus. They instead described a child-king that would follow the ways of God as a leader for God’s people in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. At that time both kingdoms were threatened by alliances with the larger kingdom of Assyria. Only in looking back at how Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecy have these names been ascribed to Jesus. In both cases, these names describe the fulfillment of God’s promise of God’s presence with God’s people.

As we gather today to celebrate our belief in Jesus as Emmanuel, God with us, these names connect us

from the child in the manger to the King of Kings.

Consider these names of Jesus.

**Wonderful Counselor**

The Hebrew word translated as wonderful has a meaning of “out of the ordinary.” The Hebrew word for counselor reminds us of a king giving wise counsel to his people, like Solomon. So when Jesus is described as a wonderful counselor, we are reminded that his counsel is the advice of God, wisdom beyond the ordinary. His counsel comes from one who knows us fully, loves us deeply, yet yearns for us to move deeper into healthy relationships with God and with one another. So Jesus is not afraid to tell the truth.

Recall when Jesus passed through Samaria and met a woman at a well. Despite their cultural differences, he speaks with her, and tells her everything she has done. He also reminds her that she is a beloved child of God. Jesus then reveals to her that he is the Messiah, and her life is changed forever.

No longer shunned, no longer afraid of being the outcast among outcasts, she returns to her city and spreads the word about Jesus with joy. (John 4)

We all need good counselors, mentors, coaches and friends. Those who are not afraid to lovingly tell us the truth, or ask the questions that will allow us to find the truth for ourselves. I am thankful for those who have helped me clarify my life’s directions, however big or small, over the years.

The best test of a good counselor is whether his or her clients are helped. From the Biblical stories to our lives today, Jesus is the most effective and wonderful counselor who ever lived. Jesus changes lives.

Consider:

• St. Augustine was a womanizing man who ran with the wild crowd

before becoming one of the church’s greatest leaders.

• John Newton was a drunken slave trader before he wrote “Amazing Grace.”

• Johnny Cash was a hard-living country singer before coming to Christ.

• Chuck Colson was a convicted Watergate conspirator before he met Christ.

The Lord led him to begin Prison Fellowship.

—Bruce Goettsche, “The wonderful counselor,” Union Church Sermon,

December 2, 2001, unionchurch.com, adapted

We are called to open ourselves to Jesus as wonderful counselor who seeks to tell us the truth about life in such a way that we are forever changed, empowered by God’s love and set free to follow Christ.

**Mighty God**

In ancient Israel, might was equated with military power and strength. Nowadays we might think of the old saying that declares the boy with the most toys wins. Yet God’s power is greater than any military will ever be. It is a different kind of strength. For God’s power is the power of life beyond death. It is the power of eternity.

When Jesus’ friend Lazarus becomes ill and dies, Jesus travels to the man’s home in Bethany. One of Lazarus’ sisters meets Jesus on the road and says, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” Jesus answers her: “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live.” Then Jesus goes to the tomb and calls Lazarus out of the tomb. The dead man emerges, and is given new life. (John 11:21, 25)

Any who heard Jesus proclaim himself as resurrection and life would have thought one of two things—

he is insane and spouting blasphemy or he is greater than we thought and is indeed God with us.

When Jesus is described as mighty God, we can celebrate that he indeed is God, and has the mighty power of life over death, a mighty power that moves us from sin to new life.

It is no coincidence that most of the Christmas movies contain a message of hope, goodwill and even new life, even if they never mention Jesus. ..Think of A Christmas Carol, which includes the transformation of the miser named Ebenezer Scrooge; It’s a Wonderful Life, with its dramatic discovery of what really matters; How the Grinch Stole Christmas, with the growth of the Grinch’s heart, which had once been “two sizes too small.” Christmas is all about moving from death to life, through the power of our Mighty God. --“Friending Jesus” 12-24-09 homileticsonline.com

We are called to open ourselves to Jesus as Mighty God who seeks to bring us from death to life, from sin to forgiveness, from despair to hope. And when we are transformed by such grace, our natural response out to be our worship and our praise.

**Everlasting Father**

Literally translated, the phrase we know as Everlasting Father can also be “The Father of Eternity.” It is a reminder that God was, is, and always will be. It is a reminder that God’s promises have no end, for they are everlasting.

Growing up, I struggled in my relationship with my earthly father. It took until college when I learned to accept myself for who I was that I learned to accept Dad for who he was. That helped our relationship tremendously. Over the years I have known women and men who struggled to view God as Father

because they had such a struggle with their own earthly fathers.

In this life there are fathers who leave their families through abandonment or neglect. Eventually we will all lose our fathers through death, and have to deal with the grief of that loss. Yet God is our father forever, a relationship not limited by choices, aging or death.

Recall at the beginning of the Gospel of John when it proclaims Jesus as the flesh-and-blood appearance of God in human life. “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. … And the Word became flesh and lived among us.” (John 1:1, 14)

Near the end of Jesus’ ministry, Philip says to Jesus, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.”

Jesus says to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” (John 14:8-9)

When Jesus is described as Everlasting Father, we can trust that God seeks to care for us for all eternity.

No matter what our past or present, no matter our sins or struggles, God reaches out to us with everlasting grace and unconditional love. We are called to open ourselves to Jesus as Everlasting Father

and abide in that relationship of love and care that continues forever, in this life as well as for all eternity.

**Prince of Peace**

When Isaiah prophesied to the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, the people expected military might and political alliances to bring peace. When Jesus was born while Israel was under Roman occupation

the Jews expected the Messiah to be a military leader, not a rural carpenter.

Yet Jesus is the Prince of Peace. His peace is not from military might, political oppression, fear or even the absence of conflict. Rather, his peace is based on truth, justice and righteousness.

As he told the Roman governor Pontius Pilate at his trial, “My kingdom is not from this world. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” (John 18:36-37)

This truth is centered in a relationship with God. So when Jesus is described as the Prince of Peace,

his ultimate desire is to reconcile each and every one of us first to a new relationship with God,

then in relationships with one another. So peace begins within us. How are we focused on God in the midst of the chaotic and often violent world we live in. How are we centered on God and God’s ways

that then influence how we interact with others.

Archbishop Oscar Romero, who lost his life in service to Christ, once said, “Peace is not the product of terror or fear.” Instead, peace is “the generous, tranquil contribution of all to the good of all. Peace is dynamism. Peace is generosity. It is right, and it is duty.” --“Friending Jesus” 12-24-09 homileticsonline.com

When Jesus as Prince of Peace seeks shalom, that shalom is a harmony among diverse groups, a peace we desperately need in our world today, a peace based on truth and care for one another. We are called to open ourselves to Jesus as Prince of Peace, to find that peace within, through our faith in God, that then translates out into how we live with others in our daily lives.

Four names to describe the child born for us—

Wonderful Counselor-Mighty God-Everlasting Father-Prince of Peace

All of these names point this morning to the gift of God’s own presence to the world, the gift of Emmanuel, God with us. In Jesus’ birth, life, suffering, death and resurrection, he epitomizes all of these names. Remember that the name Jesus literally means “God Saves.” On this day in which we celebrate Jesus’ birth, we can also celebrate that his birth is God’s gift to us today.

Through Jesus we are offered wise counsel for this life.

Through Jesus we are offered forgiveness of our sins.

Through Jesus we are offered reconciliation with God.

Through Jesus we are offered the gift of eternal life.

All we are called to do today is receive God’s gift as our own, welcome Jesus as our Savior and Lord,

and believe in the many ways that God is real in our lives, as attributed by the many names of Jesus.

This is true on Christmas Day,and true throughout the year.

This Advent season we have celebrated names of Jesus offered to Mary and Joseph through the voices of angels. Today we have celebrated names of Jesus offered to us by Isaiah. Now I invite you to close with me in celebration of Jesus’ many names through use of a chorus written by Naida Hearn and first published in 1974. This song reminds us that no matter what names or titles we give to Jesus, on this Christmas morning there is no greater name than the holy name of Jesus.

Jesus, name above all names Beautiful Savior, glorious Lord.

Emmanuel, God is with us. Blessed Redeemer, Living word.