

“Being Disciples”

Acts 11:19-26; 1 John 3:18-24;  
Psalm 15; John 15:1-11

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Pastor Norman Fowler  
First Presbyterian Church of Moscow

What’s your name? That’s a fairly easy question to answer for most of us. Most of us would quickly say our first name and our surname, and maybe if we were pressed we might come up with a middle name. We might have an extension on our name—Junior, Senior, I, II. When we think about that question—what’s our name—that’s the first thing we probably think about. We might recognize that sometimes we have a nickname, so you might be called something other than your first name. There are different ways we can think about our name.

Jesus gave Peter a new name. Peter was called Simon, and Jesus said, “I’m going to call you Peter.” *Petros* in Greek. I heard one pastor who said that Jesus was calling him Rocky because Peter means “rock.” I think he was getting at the idea that not only did Jesus say, “I’m going to build my house upon this rock,” but sometimes his relationship with Jesus was a little rocky. So Peter was renamed.

Sometimes there are other ways in which we take on a name. We did this to one of the disciples. What’s Thomas’ name? Doubting Thomas. We’ve renamed Thomas and I’m not sure he would appreciate that. It begins to get at the idea that we not only have our given name, but we have these other names, the way we take on external things that tell us who we are.

Growing up, we may have had some of these. When I was growing up, I was probably named “a good boy” in school. I was probably named “the preacher’s kid,” and although I didn’t really recognize it at the time I think some people reacted to me as the “preacher’s kid.” Then when I got a little older I played a lot of basketball. Maybe I played a little intensely, and they called me “Stormin’ Norman” sometimes. It was another name that I was given. I was in college and went to a dance, and this guy told me, “Man, you need to relax.” So I began to think that I was uptight. It was another name I took on.

What I’m inviting you to think about is what kinds of names did you take on? What names has the world named you with? What names were you given by the people around you, your teachers, your friends? In fact, I invite you to turn to the blank page in the bulletin and draw either a circle or a heart, and around the outside of that just write some of the things you were named when you were growing up. Were you named as one who couldn’t stay within the lines? Were you named as someone who was an artist or not an artist? Were you somebody who could sing or not sing? Could you play sports or not play sports? There are all kinds of ways we were named. What are some of the names you know the world around you gave you?

I’m thinking about this because I think Jesus comes into our lives in a way that asks us to think about the way we’ve been named and the way we’re renamed. As we grow

into adulthood, we recognize some of those names which we've been given and sometimes we live with that tension of those names. We can either accept them and think that who we are, or sometimes we react to them and live in reaction to them. So if someone is told they're not smart enough to be a lawyer, they're going to show them, by God, that they're going to be a lawyer. Was I told I wasn't an artist, so forever after I think I can't do anything artistic because I'm not creative? What are those kinds of names that we live with? Because, I think, what Jesus is doing is inviting us to recognize that we don't have to live with all those names that we're given. There's a certain renaming he's doing with us.

I was at a spiritual direction class yesterday and the invitation was to recognize that God has given us who we are. God truly knows our given name, because God has given us our life. The world around us often gives us different names, and we see that we struggle with that. Indeed, what Jesus has done is come and invite us to recognize some of the names he might give us, I think. One of the first names that comes to mind when I think about what Jesus has given me as a name is "forgiven."

These days we don't often think we need to be forgiven as much. Yet I think it's hard for any of us to go through life without recognizing that I know I've done things wrong and I don't know how to right them. Sometimes that wrongness is what names me. So when Jesus comes and offers to name us "forgiven" there's an opportunity to let go of what has been wrong in my life, the wrongs I've done. It's a new possibility, just like getting a new name. One of the names Jesus gives us is "forgiven."

I think another name that Jesus gives us is "children of God." He invites us to recognize that we are children of God. That we're "loved"—another name he gives us. That we're "gifted"—we all have gifts that God has given us. We all have possibilities in our lives, opportunities. In some ways there's a renaming going on. As I hear some of this, even for myself, I think about the ways I've been named and the way Jesus renames who I am. Gifted, called, loved, one who can love others, one who can hear the words of Jesus and do them. Sometimes we get in this place where it seems we hear all the things we can't do, and those are the names we bear—what we can't do. In some ways what Jesus is doing is renaming us with the things we can do. We can love one another.

So when Jesus is suggesting that we are being pruned, one of the things that are being let go of are our old names, the names that have taken us to the wrong places, that seem to restrict us or take us in directions that aren't helpful, the names we don't want to live up to or that we feel like we are always seen as or the glasses that people always see us through. Jesus wants to prune away those particular kinds of names.

Then we get to abide in him. That's the idea of staying with him. He's going to rename us and help us recognize who we are, but that's not all. When we know Jesus has come to change things, it's not just a matter of "now I believe" and then I go back to doing the same thing. He invites us to abide, a word that means *to stay with*. We see

the forgiveness, the grace that God gives us in Jesus Christ, the wonder of the power of God at work in him, and he invites us to stay with it, with him, and to live into it.

There are a couple of ways I was thinking about this. These days, I'm really thinking a lot about gardening. So if I know a Master Gardener and I want to learn more about gardening, I go to the Master Gardener. The idea of abiding with that Master Gardener is doing what he does and following his directions. Now, if I want to live life, why don't I go to a Master of Life and do what the Master says? It's a way of abiding. That's what Jesus is saying: I'm giving you direction; I'm giving you these commandments; now stay with it. If we've got a Master of Life, let's learn from that Master. His word cleanses us, he says. It helps prune away those other names.

The other way I was thinking about it is that when I buy a house, or when I find a home and start living there, the paths I take are often determined by the home I live at. So I know the roads north of town towards my house really well. But the roads on the other side of Moscow? I hardly ever go there because I don't live there. So what I think Jesus is suggesting is as we live with him, as we abide with him, as we stay with him, paths begin to form.

That's what I think the Psalm was about. These paths that come all the way from the Psalm all the way through, I think, about abiding with God and how those paths form. What are the paths that form? If we look at the beginning of that Psalm, it starts off: *Those who walk blamelessly...* They translate it "blamelessly," but I like the translation that I found of the Hebrew—*walking in integrity*. It's hard for us to think about what it means to be blameless, but I have a better idea what it means to walk with integrity, to do what is right or to see that justice is done in my life, that is to see that right relationships form and to speak the truth from my heart. Then it goes on to talk more about how we care for one another. But those are the kinds of paths that begin to form as we abide with Christ.

I always struggle a little bit in putting together the kind of Call to Worship I used this morning because it sounds a little bit like I can't come to worship unless I'm already all these things, but it's true that when I am these things I can worship better. What I think it is that it's not that we can't come to worship if we're not already there because it's Jesus who opens the door to enable us to come. But as we abide with Jesus, as those pathways form, then worship becomes easier. If I go through the week and I feel like I've lived with better integrity, I've worked on having better relationships, I've been true to my heart, it's a lot easier to come on Sunday morning and enter into worship. It's a lot easier for me to remember and to recognize the wonder of God's grace, and it feels like there's a way in which life has become just a little more joyful. Isn't that where Jesus is going—that my joy, that your joy may be complete?

It's as these pathways form and as we live them out that we abide with Jesus. It's interesting what happened in Antioch as those people did that. They were renamed. What were they renamed? Christians. In 1 John, it says don't only say it, but in truth

and in action. So as we abide with Jesus and let those pathways form, we become and we have a name to live up to.

Some of us have those shirts that have First Presbyterian and the little cross logo embroidered on them. I wore mine into the grocery store the other day, and I wasn't in the best of moods. It made me think, "How am I acting?" It was just that little symbol, but don't we always have that with us when we abide with Christ, with the truth and action in our lives?

We have a name to live up to. It's not one that restricts who we are, I don't think, but brings us life and joy. We're Christians. It's wonderful. Amen.