

Name It and Claim It!
[Text - Matthew 9:35-10:4]

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What we call something, or someone, can make a tremendous difference in how that thing or person is perceived and treated. For example, referring to others as our “sisters and brothers”, and recognizing all people as part of the One Human Family, makes us more likely to appreciate their struggles and advocate for their well-being. Conversely, calling an individual or a group a demeaning or derogatory name, is often the first step toward dehumanizing them; which makes it easier to discriminate or do violence against them further down the road. For better or for worse, the names we give to people and things, are significant and important. And the very act of naming something or someone, implies that we have a certain degree of power or control over them.

Maybe this is why, when Moses asks God for God’s name, the Holy One replies, “I AM WHO I AM!” In other words, YAHWEH says there’s *no* way that a finite, created being is going to grasp - or control - the essence of the Divine Source from whom all things originate! Unfortunately, this hasn’t stopped humankind from trying to define or contain, regulate or re-create the Infinite Source of Life into our own limited and self-serving images. Fortunately, the Good News that Jesus Christ proclaims is that in spite of our vain efforts to lay claim to the Holy One, it is the Holy One who ultimately lays claim upon *our* lives. And the Christian representation of this, is the Sacrament of Holy Baptism.

Throughout his life and ministry, Jesus teaches and demonstrates that the Realm of Divine Love and Grace is a *gift* - a free, yet extremely precious gift - which can only be received as such. Too often, the older we get, or the more religiously sophisticated we become, the more we misunderstand or misrepresent that Gift. We see it as something that we have somehow earned or deserve; something exclusive to *us*, or those like us; something which is ours to regulate,

control, or withhold. Therefore rather than receiving and sharing this marvelous gift with the joy and excitement of a little child, we take it on as our own personal cross to bear, or sacred relic to hoard and protect. Yet the gift of the Divine Realm is readily extended to all people, at any age or stage of their lives - as is demonstrated through the gift of Holy Baptism.

The act of Holy Baptism, isn't *us* laying claim to the Holy Realm or the Holy One; it is a physical and spiritual reminder of the Holy One's loving and everlasting claim upon us! And while we do our best to call upon the multifaceted Name of our Divine Source and Redeemer and Sustainer, in the end it is the Holy One calling *us* by name that truly matters. Holy Baptism, like Life itself, is a Divine Gift; and through this Gift, you and I are called to be the living vessels through whom Divine Love and Grace can live and grow, spread and evolve.

Holy Baptism is a definitive way through which our Divine Source names us and claims us! We are affirmed as children of the Holy One, and connected to a Community of Faith where we can be fed and nurtured and empowered to live Life to the fullest. Guided and inspired by Holy Spirit and by the teachings and example of Jesus Christ, you and I grow together as the *Body* of Christ. And as a welcoming and caring community, we are offered wonderful, lifelong opportunities to practice those Christ-like qualities of compassion and inclusion, forgiveness and grace.

Now, this doesn't make us better than anyone else; yet it does help us to become better versions of ourselves. That's because the Divine Source who names us and claims us, also desires to touch and transform us - and our entire world! To change our darkness into light; our fear into hope; our divisiveness into wholeness; to even turn our dying into a pathway to Life Everlasting. And every person around us needs to hear - and experience - that Good News: to know that they, too, are a loved and precious child of the Holy One! The invitation to come to the Waters of Holy Baptism [and to partake of the Bread and Cup of Holy Communion] is an invitation extended to *all*. So this morning, as we joyfully celebrate the gift of Makenzie Marie Oliver's

Baptism, let us give thanks to the Holy One who calls her - and each one of us - by name. And in the Name of that Holy One, let us graciously reach-out to *all* our sisters and brothers - recognizing, naming and welcoming them as cherished members of the Family.