

God's Name for You

[1 Kings 19:1-4, \(5-7\), 8-15a](#)

[Psalm 42 and 43](#)

[Galatians 3:23-29](#)

[Luke 8:26-39](#)

Today's gospel reading raises as many questions as it answers. Questions like

- what happened to all the pig corpses?
- What about the livelihood of the pig farmers?
- does God hate pigs?

and the more complex – if the demons went into the pigs rather than the abyss and then the pigs committed suicide – what happened to the demons? do demons drown?

I think we have to let those questions go, and the way I do it is to remember that this passage is not factual history in the way that we understand history. No doubt there is an underlying truth but this is more like a description of the kind of thing that happened when Jesus showed up.

So I'd like to direct your attention away from pigs and towards two questions. One from the gospel, one from the first reading. There God asks, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" and in the gospel Jesus says "What is your name?"

Yesterday, some of us had the joy and privilege of attending Jim Arnold's ordination to the diaconate. In her sermon, Bishop Mary talked about Joy Harjo who has just been named Poet Laureate. Harjo is the first Native American to hold this position. Her memoir is entitled "Crazy Brave," which is taken from the meaning of her name. Bishop Mary talked about how being a Christian is "crazy brave" and that Jim is "crazy brave" to be taking on the ministry of a deacon.

It led me to reflect on names, and the way American Indian names often encapsulate something which is an essential quality of the person, like Beautiful daughter of the stars, He sits at home, or She who bathes with her knees. It made me wonder what names God would give each of us. If your spiritual name were like one of those – what would it be? Might it be "One with the sunset" or "She who cooks open hearts" or "Reader of the deep"?

Each of these names provides a sense of real identity in the way that most of our names do not. Many of our names have a connection to our family, our ancestors. I was named after a great aunt who drove ambulances in the First World War. I am proud of that connection with her. But that doesn't say anything about me. In fact I did a quick google and on the first page came up with six Caroline Hall's all of whom are not me.

When Jesus asks “What is your name?” he is asking something a little more profound than “what do people call you?” In the ancient world, the power of a name was very real. It was thought that the essence of a being resided in its name, and that if you could gain access to the names of supernatural beings you could influence them. Which is of course what happened in the gospel reading. In the Hebrew tradition, to do a thing in the *name* of another, or to *invoke* or *call upon* another’s name, was to make that person effectively present, To speak the name was to call forth the soul of the person; it was an act of deep significance.¹

So when Jesus says “What is your name?” he is asking not just for information, but about the very soul of the man. And when God asks Elijah, “What are you doing here?” he is asking a very similar question. Elijah has just had a major victory against the priests of Baal and their patron, Jezebel but is now in a complete funk. He is exhausted and afraid for his life, and he is running away. When God asks “What are you doing here?” he is asking Elijah to consider his actions in the light of his prophetic calling. Running away is of course very understandable when someone is threatening to kill you, but it suggests that Elijah has forgotten his calling and his trust in the God who called him.

“What are you doing?” is a question that can bring us back to our spiritual core. What are you doing? Are you walking your talk? are you living Gospel values? Are you living out the spiritual name that God has given you?

What is your name? How do you identify?

If I start to list the things that make me who I am I will probably put being a woman and being English at the top of the list. But the second reading today from Galatians points out that in Christ there is no longer male or female, English or American, slave or free, clergy or lay. In our baptism we have been incorporated into the Body of Christ and the old distinctions no longer apply. In our baptism, we are enrolled in the reign of God, children of God, heirs of the kin-dom, a royal priesthood. “If we belong to Christ,” Paul says, if we belong to Christ, then we are all “Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.”

This is our true identity: heirs to the kin-dom of God. A truth that’s encapsulated in the hymn, “If anybody asks you who I am, tell them I’m a child of God”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y180Ygc4kwE>

This is our true identity. What is your name? “Child of God”

¹ <https://www.ssje.org/2017/01/01/the-power-of-the-name-of-jesus-br-david-vryhof/>

So, Child of God, what are you doing here? Are you running away in fear or are you living your truth? Do you know in your core that you are a beloved child of God, uniquely named, uniquely called and given the spiritual gifts you need to live out your calling?

If you don't, if there's any doubt in your mind then it's time to come to Jesus. Just like the man who lived among the tombs, the man who was so crazy that they tried to chain him up for his own safety as well as theirs but he would break loose. Many of us harbor a private fear that we are insane or that someday we'll go mad. All of us have times when it seems that there is evil at work in our hearts and minds or in the world around us. Yet healing is available in Jesus and it is yours for you are a beloved child of God.

When people came out of the town "to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind." What a beautiful picture of healing. What a beautiful picture of where each of us belongs, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in our right minds.

When healing happens the two questions are no longer different. What is your name? what are you doing here? The two merge into one; are you living the life that God created you to live, loving God with all your heart mind and soul and your neighbor as yourself?

In Revelation, it says that the Spirit will give us a white stone, and on that stone will be a name, a secret name known only to God and to us. (Rev 2:17) I wonder, what is the secret name, the spiritual name that God has given you?