

KNOW YOUR NAME
Randall Tremba
June 12, 2016
11th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

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Luke 7:36-8:3

A Pharisee named Simon asked Jesus to eat with him. And so Jesus went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. A certain woman of the city, who was a sinner, learned that Jesus was eating at that house. She came and brought an alabaster jar of ointment and stood behind Jesus at his feet, weeping. She bathed his feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. She kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment.

When Simon saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him. He would know she is a sinner."

Jesus spoke up, "Simon, I have something to say to you."

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I don't know about you but I still haven't gotten over last weekend. For most of this past week I've been on cloud nine.

First there was the astoundingly beautiful wedding of Judy and Shelia on Saturday afternoon. And then the very next day, "More Light Sunday." By the way, when we confirmed that wedding date nearly a year ago, no one noticed it was the eve of More Light Sunday. How cool is that?

Last Sunday was More Light Sunday and there was indeed more light streaming than usual in this Meeting House where, as we just sang, all can safely come, a house where all are named, loved and treasured.

*A figure comes,
bathed in light, with eyes of kindness,
a healer you knew you should have expected,
who reaches gently into your chest—
opens a drawer and takes out a small vial,
and anoints you with oil from the vial.
It fills you with light and strength.
—Steve Garnaas-Holmes*

Last Sunday there was more light in this house, as well as more joy, more tears and more laughter than usual. First, Ethel Hornbeck succinctly and brilliantly reconnected us with the history and purpose of More Light Presbyterians and their work for inclusion for some 25 years.

And then tears flowed as we heard from Rob Mahaffey, Marlene Gallo, and Chris Morehouse how hard it was to learn their true name when so many ugly names had been flung at them. *Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.* Or so we were taught to say as children.

But that clearly is not true.

Names and insults hurt and leave wounds that are hard to get over. It helps to find a place, a household, a community where all may come to know themselves as beloved. And so it was that we sang last Sunday: *Here in this place the new light is streaming, now is the darkness vanished away.*

Be not afraid, says the Beloved. I will lift you from your fear. I know your name and it is mine. Beloved.

And so last Sunday our tears turned into laughter as we heard Rob, Marlene, and Chris proclaim in one way or another their true name as beloved children of God.

And that brings us to the gospel lesson for today. A certain woman had been called ugly names, including sinner, for a long time. She was one of many whom that society had labeled unclean, loser, deviant, and pariah. That was then; but it could just as well be now. At this moment our own nation is dishonored and besmirched by loud voices yelling ugly names. Losers. Misfits. Deviants. Rapists. Cripples. Takers. Addicts.

Keep those types out. Don't let those sorts in the house. Lock the doors. Secure the fences. Those types will defile our purity.

A certain woman had been called ugly names, including sinner, for a long time. But somehow this woman had learned that was not her name the way it takes some children a long time to discover their name is not, "Hey Stupid!" First impressions are lasting impressions and it takes a while, sometimes a long while, for people to heal from such hurts and wounds.

Somehow this woman had learned her name was not sinner or scumbag. Perhaps she once heard the voice of Jesus saying, *come unto me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest.* Perhaps she had heard that voice saying, *In the shadows of the night, I will be your light. I love you and you are mine.*

It's a voice that many have heard in this place and elsewhere. Sometimes in the silence. Sometimes in a song. Sometimes in a story. Sometimes in a word that leads to freedom.

Words matter. Words can destroy and words can lead to healing and freedom.

As Fr. Greg Doyle put it in his heart-wrenching book, *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion*, a book recollecting his 20 some years in the barrios of East LA, helping children caught in a web of gang violence, domestic abuse and poverty to discover and know their true names: *Everyone is just looking to be told that who he or she is is right and true and wholly acceptable.*

Jesus was a dinner guest at the table of a prominent citizen named Simon. Simon was rich. He was privileged. He had everything society offered delivered on a silver platter. Simon knew none of the grace discovered in adversity, poverty, rejection and exclusion. None of the grace that a certain woman had come to know. None of the grace that leads to deep gratitude.

A notorious woman stepped in off the street and knelt by Jesus feet. She washed them with her tears and anointed them with precious ointment out of gratitude for her new life. The host muttered under his breath how despicable it was for Jesus, a so-called holy man, to allow such a publicly known sinner to touch him.

Jesus heard Simon's snide thoughts and turned on his host. *Simon, he said, do you see this woman? Do you see THIS woman?*

And that's all we need to hear this morning. *What do we see when we see the other?*

Do we see a beloved child of God? If not, why not?

I've officiated nearly 250 weddings, but none more joyful or full of tears than the one I did a week ago. Judy and Shelia had been friends, sweethearts and partners for 20 years. They are parents of three beautiful children. Judy and Sheila endured many ugly names and glances, many slings and arrows from many different angles.

But here in this place, they had come to know—beyond a shadow of a doubt—their true names as beloved children of God. And maybe that's why they wanted all their guests to sing with them a certain hymn that had come to mean so much to them. *I will come to you. You are mine. I have called you each by name.*

If you've lost faith in your true name, I hope you will hear and embrace it this morning. You are beloved.

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Hymn 177
"I Will Come to You"