

## *Questions Jesus Asked sermon series*

### *“What is Your Name?”*

[Luke 8:26-30](#)

This Lenten season, we are reflecting on some of the questions Jesus asked. Last Sunday, we considered the first question: “What Are You Looking for?” from the Gospel of John. Today, we turned to the second question: “What Is Your Name?” from the Gospel of Luke.

Names are an important part of our identity. Our names reveal to others something about who we are and where we are from. Anyone who sees or hears my name would know either I came from somewhere in Asia and/or that I have Asian parents. Among the Kono in Sierra Leone, children are traditionally named according to their birth order and gender. So, if your first name is Sia or Sahr, people know that you are a first-born child. And, if your name is Kumba or Tamba, people know that you are a second-born child. If one has a biblical name, like Pastor Daniel, we know that the person has a Christian family background.

The meaning and sound of our names can also create certain images for us. So, choosing a name for their children is something parents give much thought and discussion over. They go through books of names for babies, trying to find the most beautiful and perfectly fitting name for their baby who is on the way. That’s what my daughter and son-in-law did for their daughter last year. After many a few months of going through books of names for babies, they narrowed down to two possibilities: Olivia and Isabelle. After going back and forth for a while, they decided to call their baby Olivia. When my granddaughter was finally born, she looked like exactly Olivia!

This was not the case for my parents. They did not have to sweat over the name choice for their first child. Back then in Korea, the tradition was for grandparents to name their first grandchild. So, my grandfather named me Ouk-Yean, a combination of two characters meaning jade and pond. Did I like my name? No, not at all. I thought it sounded too girly and old-fashioned. I envied my friends’ names that seemed to sound more modern, creative, and sophisticated. But, what could I do? After all, it was the name my grandfather chose for me. I was told that he had even consulted someone who professionally created names for people. Eventually, I have grown to like my name. When I moved to the States, I thought about adopting an English name but could not settle on the right one. So, here I am, 30 years later, still Ouk-Yean. And for those who are not familiar with Korean names, just imagine “an oak tree” for the first half of my name and “yawning” for the second half.

You can imagine my surprise when one day one of my colleagues said to me, “Ouk-Yean, a peaceful pond is the image that comes to my mind when I think of you.” He said this not having any idea that the word for pond was part of my name! Perhaps, my grandfather and the naming consultant were able to get a glimpse of who I would become, or perhaps over time, I’ve just grown into my name.

Now, I want you to turn to your neighbor with these questions: What is your name? Does your name have any meaning? Any story about your name? Let’s talk to each other for a few seconds.

As much as names are important to us now, in the ancient world, they carried even greater value and significance. Ancient people understood that a name expressed the character and identity of the person who carried it. A name

would reveal crucial information about one's family history, one's origins and background. To know someone's name meant to know the person. So asking for someone's name was the first step of starting a new relationship. And, today's scripture reading tells us that it was what Jesus did to a mad man he encountered during one of his road trips.

Traveling to different towns and villages with his twelve disciples and some women followers, Jesus proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God, cast out evil spirit, and performed miracles of healing wherever he went. Near the end of the trip, Jesus took his disciples to the other side of the lake of Galilee. It was a non-Jewish area, so a place of unfamiliarity to Jesus and his entourage. As soon as they arrived there, a mad man ran toward them, shouting Jesus' name. He begged Jesus not to bother him. But, Jesus ignored the man's plea and asked him, "What is your name?"

As the story tells us, the man lived naked in a graveyard. He was chained hand and foot and kept under guard. It was to protect others from his violent outbursts and to protect him, as well. He had been condemned as ritually unclean and cast out from his village. Probably out of fear, no one, not even his own family wanted to get close to him. In his agitated state, he was more at home amongst the dead, living in tombs and in isolation. But, Jesus did not avoid the man when he ran toward him. He saw beyond the man's terrible physical condition and horrifying mental state. The man answered Jesus' question of "what is your name," "Legion," he replied.

Legion was neither the man's given name nor his nickname. It was a name he had adopted for himself, a name he had come to identify himself with. A legion was a unit of the Roman army comprising of five to six thousand soldiers, who often treated people in occupied lands with brutality. When the man called himself Legion, he was revealing how much the demonic power was tormenting him.

The poor man had forgotten his real name, the name of his childhood, the name his parents had given him and his sibling and friends had called him by, the very name that revealed to others who he truly was. All of it was lost to the ravages of his mental illness, specifically his multiple personality disorder, a condition people in the ancient world did not understand. His name and everything it represented, his true nature and identity, his family history, his social connection had been taken over by his torment. And, his demon-possessed condition became his new identity.

I wonder how much we are like this man who called himself Legion. Of course, we do not live in the graveyard among the tombstones. We do not run around naked. We are not screaming at people. We are not drinking day and night. We are not sleeping on the streets. We do not look or sound like a crazy person, especially in church, surrounded by fellow Christian believers.

But, I am sure each of us can name a demon or two, living within us. It might be too shameful or painful to recognize or admit the truth about ourselves. But, we know it's there, though it might have been buried under years of denial. Who among us has not been hurt and wounded? Who among us has not wrestled with self-doubting questions? Who among us has not questioned God's presence in our lives in the midst of our troubles? Through today's scripture reading, we are invited to name the demons in us - our sins, our fears, all the things that push us from the presence of God and into places of isolation. The good news is that, even when the demons in our lives are unchained and get the better of us, and we become unrecognizable even to ourselves, we are not alone. Jesus comes to us and asks us, "What is your name?" "Who are you right now?" How would you answer?

2000 years ago, Jesus went outside the land of his own people and entered a foreign place. There, he saw a man in pain and suffering and began to heal him, which is what he did everywhere he went. And he started by asking a question, "What is your name?" Today, Jesus comes to us, too. He enters the places in our hearts, the places that have drifted away from the presence of God. He sees us in pain and suffering. And, he begins to heal us by asking our name. "The first step in the work of healing, reconciliation and restoration is to name names," (*What Did Jesus Ask?* ed. by Elizabeth Dias, p. 91) and to name the things that caused the harm.

God cares us enough to ask for our name, to become intimate with us, to have a relationship with us, to love us despite the condition of our lives, despite the state of our hearts. The journey toward healing begins when we believe that God knows us by our true name and forgets the name we have given ourselves.

The Bible tells us that some names changed in this process of healing. Abram became Abraham and he received a blessing of a multitude of descendents. His wife's name also changed from Sarai to Sarah. Jacob became Israel after a night of wrestling with God and his new name became the name of his nation. Simon, the fisherman and then the head disciple of Jesus became Peter, the Rock, the foundation of the early Church. Saul became Paul when he was confronted by the risen Christ. Jesus healed the man who called himself Legion, whose life was possessed by a multitude of demons. As he was healed, dignity and respect were restored to him, and he went away with a new identity. Luke does not tell us if the man was given a new name. But, we are told that he was given a mission to spread all over town how much Jesus had done for him. So, how about "Evangelist" for his new name?

The prophet Isaiah said, "But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel; Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name. You are mine." (Isaiah 43:1) Christ asks us for our name not just once but again and again. He asks us for our name over and over because we often forget our true name, the name God has given us, Child of God and call ourselves by different names. Christ comes to us, asking that question, "What is your name?"

May we have the courage to answer. May we name the things which we keep buried, which keep us away in isolation. For as the Psalmist says, "Even the darkness is not dark to him, the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light with him" (Psalm 139:12). May we embrace the healing and restoration that is available to us in Christ every time we honestly respond to his invitational question, "What is your name?"

Thanks be to God!