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Following Foolishly into Freedom

My name is Troy. What is your name?

It is a simple enough question. It is often the first words that come out of our mouth when we meet someone for the first time. It is how we begin to introduce ourselves. It can be spoken in a tone of invitation and accusation and a million other ways. It is so innocuous and routine that we do not even give it a second thought, yet it can be a doorway into some of the most complicated things about us.

What is your name? Are there stories others tell about it? Stories you share? Are you named after someone? Does your name fit you? Do you long to change your name? Have you changed it? What is your relationship to it?

I am named after my Grandpa Troy who I never met. My dad's dad. He died just before my mom found out she was pregnant with me. He lived a lot of his life in the state of Mississippi. A truck driver among other things. He was loving, and funny. Always wanted to make people feel comfortable. He struggled with addiction for most of his life and lived with the demons that haunt those stalked by it.

My middle name is Elvis. The son of Northeast Mississippi and pride of Tupelo.

I remember the first time I was invited to reflect on my name. It brought up all sorts of things. Wounds I carry that I didn't even know about, things I wonder about that make more sense, and gifts I have that I know come from somewhere.

There is particularity to our names even if we share it with others. They hold so much. We hold so much. We carry so much as we walk throughout our lives.

We are brought into a panoply of particularity today. The son of God has been born deep into the flesh of this world- not in some vague generality but in real places with real people. Real space and real time.

Do you hear it? Do you see it? The kingdom of Heaven has come near. Within reach. Within our grasp. Moved in nearby. Close to you.

The *word* from the beginning left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali. As he was walking he came upon the Sea of Galilee. There he found fishermen. Folks with vocations. With sorrow and joy, burdens and blessings. Friends and family. People with testimonies and stories. With names. Brothers, one named Simon called Peter and Andrew his brother. Later he found two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee.

Jesus came to them and said, "Follow me." Immediately they dropped their nets and followed.

The promise and particularity of this God who comes to dwell among this creation has found its way across time and space to you. God deep in your flesh. The one who hung the stars is speaking. Do you hear the voice?

This one knows you completely. This one sees you and those nets you carry and try to mend over and over to no avail. The ones no one else sees. The nets that stay hidden. He knows your name and all that it holds. The grief and the loss. The disappointment and the betrayal. The narratives you try to escape but seem to always show up. The shame. The legacy. The triumphs and the failures. All of the ways we try to live up to our name or the names given to us from a million different places yet always fall short.

With all of that swirling around and underneath us, he calls *you* today. By name. Come, follow me. From the waters of baptism we are given all we need. Sealed with the Holy Spirit, forgiven of our sins, the cross forever traced over our brow, placed in a new community where water is thicker than blood as Pete Pero said. We recognize his voice amid the noise. There he completes our name and makes it holy with a name that carries yours, all of who you are, and embraces you completely. _____ beloved child of God.

In this place we are face to face with our crucified and risen Savior. His body- the reign of God comes to you in liberating word, nourishing bread, shoulders of neighbors, and in the gaze of strangers. In the presence of our companion and redeemer, we cannot help but drop our nets like those first disciples. You know what is in yours. Your perpetual self-salvation projects and countless creative attempts to justify yourself. Your white-knuckled grip on your life and things-seeking the illusion of control over others and our own bodies. The ways you seek approval from others and God that leave you in bondage, unable to stand because they weigh you down. You can drop it.

Then there are things the world puts in your nets. Shame. Expectations. Lies about your value. The false gospel that equates productivity with worth. Stories about your name and those like you that keep you from being all God made you to be in baptism. You can drop it.

Be free in Christ. He beckons you forward. On this path we know that what Detrich Bonheaffer said is true. When Christ calls a person- he bids them come and die. We also know that to find our life we must lose it and only in death we find resurrection. In the myriad deaths we experience each day, loosening our grip, we prepare for the final death that is our doorway into eternal life.

He speaks your name, yes *your name*, beloved, and says-

Follow me to the cross and to the empty tomb. Follow me to the tombs of your life. To the ends you occupy. The graves that you know well. Follow me to the crosses of this world. Follow me to the places of death on this wounded earth.

In every one of those places you will find life himself has come near and is already there- against all odds. So, we join him in our varied vocations as his wounded and living body: in yours, on this ground, in this village, in this community. Together we live into what one pastor calls blessed self forgetfulness, set free from the chains of self obsession. We will sing, Co-workers in his sacred ministry.

Fishing for people might look like helping each other drop our nets and find our place in God's spacious, cruciform, and unconditional love that has met us here will lead us all the way.

Do you hear him call your name?
Come follow me.

In the name of + Jesus. Amen.