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Feast of the Name of Jesus/New Years Day 2024  
Grace River Forest  
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*The Name that Creates Life*

The names given to us reveal so much. Our ancestry, where we come from, who we belong to, who we are connected to, what our legacy is and so much more. Maybe we are named after someone, or our middle name is a nod to a distant relative. Or you have felt like your name never fit you no matter how hard you tried to force yourself into its pre-constructed definitions or society's expectations for people with those names. Or you never fit into our culture's expectations of what someone of your particular gender should do or be like. Your name is wrapped up with that. Perhaps you were adopted or are estranged from your blood family and so there is ambivalence, pain, outright rejection of your given names, or things are at least a little complicated. Whether we like it or not there are stories associated with our names. Maybe they are reminders of broken relationships in this broken world.

A relative of mine often shares about their first day at a new school and the bullying they endured because of their name. A lifetime later the words of cruel kids about a name still stings.

The name I carry is a complex web of love, failure and hope. Troy Medlin. I never met my grandpa Troy. He died around the time my mom found out she was pregnant with me. He was born in a dirt floor shack in Mississippi. The kind you can still find evidence of if you venture far enough into the deep hollows blanketed by kudzu and copperheads. He was haunted all his life by addiction and died too young. Just like so many men in my bloodline. Those details are never far away from my heart when I introduce myself and say, "my name is Troy Medlin." Just as he did between 1938 and 1990.

Mary's child is called Jesus. Its meaning is something like "God saves." Given this name and the rite of circumcision on the 8th day of his very human life. He would then continue to carry that name into this world as he bears and reveals the very heart of the triune God for all creation and for you and me wrapped in vulnerable flesh just as we are. No longer would we need to search in shadows for glimpses of almighty God. This God is forever made known in the little one. For he is the image of the invisible God. God is forever named Jesus.

Throughout his life he would bear this name into every corner of this world. Going to extraordinary lengths to show the extent of God's love. The one named Jesus is sometimes called a glutton, drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. No doubt named "outcast" as he seemed to spend his time among those who society deemed least and lost. Embodying this name will lead him to a cross where he is called "cursed." Three days later he would be called "gardener." He called Mary by her name as he walked

on this fragile earth as the risen one. Taking this name all the way through death into resurrection. Planting new life around graves and all places left abandoned and shuttered and behind every heavy stone placed before every tomb where the world has named "death" as the final word and walked away. For this word, still living and active, cannot be thwarted.

On this new years day, if you are anything like me you are feeling a mixture of excitement and dread. This year will bring good things, I pray, and God will be faithful. Yet, I cannot help but fear what this year might bring too. It's a presidential election year. Also, simply another year still yearning for Jesus to come and make all things new and put every broken thing back together again.

And there are still our names. Those chosen and those given. Not just our "legal" names but those hoisted upon us. Workaholic, sick, old, disappointment, failure, weak, from the wrong side of town, not smart enough, not good enough. We could go on. They follow us into 2024.

On your 8th day. When you were baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity you were, as Paul writes this morning: adopted. Now the son resides in your heart. Today we can cry out "abba." We are children of God. The name of Jesus, in the form of a cross, now marks you for all time and seasons. Names you as beloved. No other name can define you forever no matter where it came from or who gave it to you. The name of Jesus assures us of that. In the fullness of time this one named Jesus will gather up all those names and all of us and make real all of those promises. Death and all those death dealing names will be buried for good.

We live in the name of Jesus even as we wait and struggle, pray and hope. In his name we have space to rest and to imagine. To risk and to work. To live even as our bodies grow another year older. To carry the name of Jesus into 2024. Cultivating resurrection in soil long forgotten. Reminding others of their names. Beloved. Just as others remind you who we really are and who we belong to. Who has done that for you? Connected to the one named death and resurrection we might even ask "what other name is God calling you to make flesh now that you live in Jesus name?" What new names are possible now on the other side of your 8th day?

Some names seem to keep us stuck. This name creates. And still does today for you. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

