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Let's Name It

It's safe to say that in our lifetimes the average person will meet 10,000 people. Some articles say it could be closer to 3 million.

It's that much more profound and meaningful when you see someone that you haven't seen in years and your eyes lock and you experience that gift of recognition. Space is opened up for love and appreciation.

Most of those folks we meet in passing, only sharing a brief glance of acknowledgement, some we only notice for a second as their faces join the ever increasing blurry, broken, yet beautiful mosaic of humanity sketched on our own experience.

That's a lot of names. We are not expected to remember or even ask the name of all of those people and yet each of them has one. A name, and with that name a story, a history. Oftentimes as complicated as our own.

Imagine a word cloud that includes all the names of those we have come across in our lives stretching out into eternity- and the new shape and names that image would create for you.

Sonny, Bob, Lisa, Tim, Elsie- just a few of the names of those I'm related to by blood who have given shape to my own name. There is grandpa Troy- my namesake. Born in New Albany, Mississippi and died before I was born. Our lives in some ways could not be more different and yet I speak his name whenever I speak my own. Bringing him into this present moment.

Walt, Jeff, Craig, Joy, Linda, Jan- more names. From high school coaches to seminary professors. They each helped to crack open meaning and possibility for me in different ways. Their names have brought color and verve and depth to my own. Their names have allowed my name to carry more into this world than I could ever have done without them.

In South Africa it is called Ubuntu- I am because you are.

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In the verses directly following the ones we heard from Luke 2 there is a moment of recognition. Simeon knew that when his eyes locked with this little one he would know instantly who it was that was in his presence. There's just something about that baby boy. Something about that name.

Oh, when I think about that name. It makes us sometimes shed a tear, smile, sing, and even shout.

Mary's newborn is called Jesus. Its meaning is something like "God saves." He is given this name on the 8th day of his scandalously ordinary beautiful human life (as flesh and blood as you and me). He would then continue to carry that name into this world as he unwraps the very heart of the triune in countless ways large and small.

Throughout his life he would bear this name into a world in desperate need of it. Joining his name to all those who walk this way. All your names.

He would speak the name of those the world seemed to push to the side. In recognizing those others only ignore he brings new life and a new future to those trapped in dead ends. Giving life and verve to names that seemed forgotten or had run their course.

The one named Jesus would be called many names. Being true to his name will lead him to a cross where he is called cursed. Three days later as he walked out of his own tomb he would call Mary by her name. Recognition. Resurrection. Called by her name she encounters the one who loves her, sees her, saves, heals, and delivers. Oh, when I think about that name. It makes us sometimes shed a tear, smile, sing, and even shout.

There's just something about that name. That wonderful, beautiful, glorious name.

The word, the way, the truth, the life, the door, the gate, the good shepherd, bread, vine, and gardener. Song in the night, bright and morning star, dawn from on high, the ancient of days, the lilly of the valley. The pioneer and perfecter of our faith. The beginning and the end.

The name of Jesus. God- for you and always moving in your direction. God who has moved into your neighborhood. Even the patch-work paths of your own heart. Potholes and all. God lives there- and will never abandon you. God's address is your own body and God is not moving out. Not even in death. You know his name. That wonderful, beautiful, glorious name. It makes us sometimes shed a tear, smile, sing, and even shout in delight.

He will always recognize you- even in the moments you are barely recognizable to yourself. His look is one of love. Instant and never ending.

On this 8th Day of Christmas, we recall our own 8th day. The day we were baptized. Given a new name. Not one that erases our own- but makes space for all that it holds. Beloved child of God. A name too that is stronger than all the names hoisted upon us that never seem to fit even if they do sting.

My in-laws have a large family tree of sorts with lots of names on it hanging in their living room. Names that are signs that without them they would not be here. Their names made others possible.

May we recognize the gift of Immanuel in a myriad of faces. In his name- may we see ours and others as a part of that great word cloud of witnesses. The body of Christ. Finding our place on that family tree. Recognizing one another into mutual resurrection.

We know him when we see him. So, when we do, let's name it.