

Spring Lake Presbyterian Church
Rev. Kathryn M. Treadway
January 20, 2008

Psalm 40

¹*I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry.*

²*He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure.*

³*He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the LORD.*

⁴*Happy are those who make the LORD their trust, who do not turn to the proud, to those who go astray after false gods.*

⁵*You have multiplied, O LORD my God, your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us; none can compare with you. Were I to proclaim and tell of them, they would be more than can be counted.*

⁶*Sacrifice and offering you do not desire, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required.*

⁷*Then I said, "Here I am; in the scroll of the book it is written of me.*

⁸*I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart."*

⁹*I have told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation; see, I have not restrained my lips, as you know, O LORD.*

¹⁰*I have not hidden your saving help within my heart, I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation; I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness from the great congregation.*

¹¹*Do not, O LORD, withhold your mercy from me; let your steadfast love and your faithfulness keep me safe forever.*

Isaiah 49:1-7

49*Listen to me, O coastlands, pay attention, you peoples from far away! The LORD called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb he named me. ²He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away. ³And he said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified." ⁴But I said, "I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my cause is with the LORD, and my reward with my God." ⁵And now the LORD says, who formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to him, for I am honored in the sight of the LORD, and my God has become my strength— ⁶he says, "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."*

⁷*Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations, the slave of rulers, "Kings shall see and stand up, princes, and they shall prostrate themselves, because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."*

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

*1**Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, ²To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: ³Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴I give thanks to my God always for you because of the*

grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind—⁶just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you—⁷so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁸He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

John 1:29-42

²⁹The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” ³⁰This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ ³¹I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.” ³²And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. ³³I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’” ³⁴And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.” ³⁵The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!”

³⁷The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi” (which translated means Teacher), “where are you staying?” ³⁹He said to them, “Come and see.” They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon. ⁴⁰One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. ⁴¹He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Anointed). ⁴²He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter).

Calling Names

Children are known for calling names. A girl gets glasses . . . she becomes “Four-Eyes.” A boy is small for his age . . . he becomes “Mouse.” I can’t tell you how many “boogers” I knew as a teenager. It wasn’t quite in the double-digits, but anything more than 1 was a bit extreme, wouldn’t you think? In a name we discover our identity. Our lives are frequently lived in response to our given names. Think not? You only have to remember Johnny Cash’s *Boy Named Sue*.

*My daddy left home when I was three
And he didn't leave much to ma and me
Just this old guitar and an empty bottle of booze.
Now, I don't blame him cause he run and hid
But the meanest thing that he ever did
Was before he left, he went and named me "Sue."*

*Well, he must o' thought that is quite a joke
And it got a lot of laughs from a' lots of folk,
It seems I had to fight my whole life through.
Some gal would giggle and I'd get red
And some guy'd laugh and I'd bust his head,
I tell ya, life ain't easy for a boy named "Sue."*

*Well, I grew up quick and I grew up mean,
My fist got hard and my wits got keen,
I'd roam from town to town to hide my shame.
But I made a vow to the moon and stars
That I'd search the honky-tonks and bars
And kill that man who gave me that awful name.*

The song continues as many of you have heard with Sue finally meeting up with his dad and getting into a pretty ugly fight. But when his dad took time to explain that the name was given to make him stronger, “Sue” was able to hug his dad and call him by his rightful name, Pa.

Sure, it’s silly, but it helps us to understand how names and identities are closely linked. Last week we focused on the names we were given at our baptisms: *Children of God*. We were to remember that name so that we can also remember to live out our identities related to such a special name throughout our life.

Today’s scriptures remind us again of our identities as followers of God, speaking our names into existence through the breath of the Holy Spirit speaking through the Word of God.

In the Psalms we read, ³*He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God*. After the Lord heard the Psalmist’s cry and pulled him out of a time of difficulty, a new song of praise was set upon his tongue. And when the praise could come, the psalmist’s identity allowed others to put their trust in God. How would you like that name – Praise Singer?!!!!

In Isaiah, we discover a God who names people. *The LORD called me before I was born, while I was in my mother’s womb he named me.* ²*He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away.* ³*And he said to me, “You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.”* Once again the name and the identity that is received allows God’s name to be glorified. It is as if our names and God’s name are braided together. When I recognize that my name is “Child of God,” others recognize that God’s name is Glory! *“Kings shall see and stand up, princes, and they shall prostrate themselves, because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.”*

In I Corinthians the letter opens stating the identity of both the writer and the receivers: *IPaul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,* ²*To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:* Names are no longer simply Paul and Joan and Don and Barbara and Sue, but are consumed by a larger identity: One who is called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God! Those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints!

And then in John we hear how Jesus calls Simon to follow him, but when he does, he renames him, calling him Peter/Cephas/Rock. Jesus gives Simon a new identity. We don’t know why – we don’t know if there was something harmful in his former name – maybe Simon was the equivalent of “Sue” – but we do know that Jesus changed Simon’s identity to Peter.

In each lectionary passage we are forced to look at identity and to faithfully ask ourselves if we hear God calling names? If we hear God renaming us and changing the way we interact with the world. We are asked to reflect on our own identities. Each of us may ask, Who am I? and more specifically, who is God calling me to be?

The truth of the matter is that we are sinners – people who mess up, who spend too much or save too much; who refuse to give or refuse to take; who hurt someone’s feelings by saying too much or hurt someone’s feelings by saying too little. We are people who are good intentioned or bad intentioned and who make good and bad

choices on an ongoing basis. But ALWAYS our overarching identity is that we are the People of God, FORGIVEN and LOVED by Almighty God. And the question is, will we allow ourselves to be changed and to be a vessel of change because of that identity?

Every week we sing, *Fill me with your power, Lord, change the world through me.* When God's power fills us, the focus changed from people looking at us and seeing Paul and Joan and Don and Barbara and Sue to seeing God who lives in us. The Psalmist wrote, *Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the LORD.* When people look at those who are filled with God's power and are changing the world, they will see God and be filled with awe and reverence and place their trust in the Lord.

Knowing our identity and choosing to live it are two different things. But if we honestly pray, *Change the World Through Me!*, then the living out of our identity as Christians will change as well, for we will no longer be seeking to push our agenda upon the world, but God through us can live God's life to others. God doesn't ask that we adhere to a checklist of rules, but rather that we open ourselves to allow God's life to live through us.

And so we end the sermon today, praying the words from a song that did not belong to Johnny Cash. *Take now my life. Let me live for Thee. Fill me with your power, Lord. Change the world through me.*
Amen.