

Isaiah 43.1-7  
God Has Called You by Name!  
SWCOB 1.10.10

So what's in a name anyway?

Bill, Bob, Billy Bob,  
Sally, Sarah, Sue,  
Ken, Kyle, Kerry,

Elissa, Alyssa, Melissa,  
Emmy, Emma, Emily,  
Terry, Theresa,  
Wiley, Willy, Wilma, Willadene,

Names are names are names.

Some names are pretty common:

Donnie here, is a special guy,  
But you wouldn't tell it by his name,

There are 4 Dons and 8 Donald Millers in the phone book.

Actually, there are two Don and Gail Millers in the phone book!

You don't want to know how many Smiths are in the book!  
493.

If you Google David Whitten,  
You will find a David Whitten,  
Who owns an art studio in Utah,

A David Whitten, a professor in Minnesota.

And to top it off,  
There is a Rev. David Whitten,  
Who is a pastor in Orange Co. Virginia!

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But despite our common names,  
They become us.

We grow into their names.

After awhile, George begins to look like a George,  
And even his dog starts to look like him.

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So, what in a name?

We know what's in a name,  
When we are with a loved one whose name is Henrietta,  
And we accidentally call her, Thelma!

We know what's in a name then, don't we?

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There are names and then there are names!

There was a sociologist named Dalton Conley,  
Who along with his wife, Natalie Jeremijenko,

Sought permission with the city of New York,  
To change their four-year-old son's name.

His name is now,  
Yo Xing Heyno Augustus Eisner Alexander Weiser  
Knuckles Jeremijenko-Conley.

A lot of his name was actually already there.

His parents added three middle names,  
And the boy added two,  
Including Knuckles his father's boyhood dog.

They call him Yo for short.

~~

Actually there are others whose names have been changed.

God changed the name of many Biblical characters:

Abram to Abraham,  
    Sarai to Sarah,  
        Jacob to Israel,  
            Simon to Peter,  
                And Saul to Paul.

And in the final book of the Bible, Revelation,  
    It says that God will ultimately change all of our names.

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In today's Isaiah passage, God calls his people by name.  
    He has redeemed them,  
        And they are his!

Isaiah, the prophet, lived during the time of the divided kingdoms.

Following the reign of King David and King Solomon,  
    Israel became divided.

King Jeroboam became the king of the northern kingdom, Israel,  
    And King Rehoboam ruled the southern kingdom, Judah.

During Isaiah's time, the northern kingdom,  
    Had been conquered by the Assyrians,  
        And they lived as captives.

However, the southern kingdom, Judah,  
    Still lived as an independent country,  
        Until the Babylonians conquered them in 587 BC.

But that is beyond our own timeframe.

In the book of Isaiah,  
    The prophet addresses both kingdoms.

Isaiah warned the people of the consequences,  
    Of sinful living,

And pleaded with them to return to a life of faith.

And now as the northern kingdom mourned their fate,  
Isaiah's words move from harsh condemnation,  
To words of encouragement.

He reminds the people that God is still in control,  
And God will be there for those who turn to him.

And then God says something here in this text,  
That is quite profound.

Using the NRSV, I quote beginning in verse one;

**Do not fear, for I have redeemed you,  
I have called you by name,  
You are mine.**

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The idea that God has called us each by name,  
Is quite profound and yet this is the God we know.

Jesus describes it this way, as found in John 10.3-4

**He calls his own sheep by name,  
And leads them out.**

**When he has brought out all his own,  
He goes ahead of them and the sheep follow,**

**Because they know his voice.**

~~

God says,  
I have called you by name!  
You are mine!  
I have redeemed you!

God says,  
**Everyone who is called by my name,**

**Whom I created for my glory,  
Whom I formed and made,**

**Do not be afraid, for I am with you!**

~~

Diane, God has called you by name,  
You are his!

Donnie, Raynard, Jo, Jim, Phyllis,  
God has called you by name!  
He has redeemed you!

Do not be afraid, he is with you.

God has called each of us by name,  
And we are his, the sheep of his pasture.

~~

There is story by William Willamon.

He had been a pastor at a rather large church,  
Before becoming the chaplain at Duke University.

One day a man approached him at the university,  
And asked Willamon if he knew him.

“I’m Ron,” the man said to Willamon.

And then Willamon remembered.

Little Ron sat on the front row,  
Up front, with his mother and brother,  
At the large congregation he had served.

He was, as Willamon remembered,  
A handful for his mother,  
Who had to squelch him from time to time.

Ron told Willamon,

That he was at college,  
Because of Willamon's influence.

Willamon, puffing up slightly, asked Ron,  
"What was it I did,  
To make a difference in your life?"

"Was it my sermons,  
Or perhaps my pastoral care,  
I gave your mom after the divorce?"

Ron replied, "No, I don't remember any of that."

"What I remember is that you always knew my name."

"That's it?" thought Willamon.

"I don't think we ever had a pastor who knew my name."

~~

So what's in a name?

Everything.

We want more than anything in life to be known.

We like it when someone we look up to,  
Knows us by name.

And way down deep inside,  
More than anything else in the world,  
We want to be known by God.

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We, who are called by Christ's name, Christian,  
Are God's people.

God has called us by name. We are his!

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We, the people that form the collected body,

Called the South Waterloo Church of the Brethren,  
Have also been called by name.

There is a purpose in all of this.  
There is a purpose that God has for us,  
As his church!

This church has served this community,  
For 154 years,  
And its work is not yet done.

The work of the church is to know Christ,  
And to make Christ known.

This is what we are about!  
This is what we are called by name to do!  
This is our aim, mission, and vision!

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During our recent board retreat,  
We discussed many things.

But one thing we discussed that was really important to me,  
Was a discussion surrounding these questions:

1. How do we communicate the story of God's love?
2. How do we discover which fields are ripe for harvest?
3. What is it that we do well?
4. What is South Waterloo's niche?

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These are important questions that need to be considered.

In the time and place of mega-churches,  
Is there still a place for a church like us,  
A somewhat traditional institution?

Are we a failure because we are not like one of them?

Could there be people out there who would rather,  
    Be in a church that is small enough,  
        To know everyone,  
            And to have everyone know them?

I think there is.

I believe South Waterloo can offer something,  
    That a large, Walmart style of church cannot,  
        A church-wide, warm and close fellowship.

In last Sunday's Waterloo Courier,  
    There was an article on the growing trend in Christendom,  
        For micro-churches.

First it was the mega-churches,  
    Now it is the micro-churches!

The article said that people looked to smaller churches,  
    For a more family type of atmosphere,  
        And the desire to be a significant participant.

This is certainly nothing new to the Church of the Brethren.

80% of Brethren congregations,  
    Have attendance of 75 or smaller.

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We must not try to define success,  
    As to whether we fit the mold of mega-churches,  
        Or micro-churches.

The success of our congregation is determined,  
    By the presence of the Holy Spirit,

And by the total and undying commitment of its members,  
    To Jesus and the Gospel message.

You can walk into any church,  
And determine the level of the Spirit,  
Within a few minutes of arrival.

You can feel it.

What does a first time worshiper feel,  
When he or she worships with us?

Do they sense the Spirit's presence?  
Is there a level of excitement that can be felt here?

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It reminds me of a story I heard from by Robert Strand

“A country preacher was preaching very pointedly,  
To his congregation one Sunday morning.

He said, ‘Now, let the church walk!’

Deacon Jones said, ‘AMEN, let it walk!’

The preacher then said,  
‘Let the church run!’

Deacon Jones said, ‘AMEN, Parson, let it run!’

‘Let the church fly!’ shouted the preacher.

‘AMEN, brother, let it fly!’ shouted Deacon Jones.

‘Now it’s going to take a lot of money to let it fly, brother,’  
Shouted the preacher.

‘Let it walk, then,’ said Deacon Jones, ‘let it walk.’”

~~

God has called the South Waterloo Congregation by name,  
To do his will,  
Here, in Orange Township, Iowa.

What is our niche?

This is our niche.

We are a community church that has served,  
Orange Township since 1856.

We are a church that is small enough,  
That not only God knows everyone by name,  
Everyone else knows everyone by name!

We have always ministered to the community,  
We have provided a strong Christian presence,  
We have strongly supported the local school,

And we have assisted our neighbors in times of tragedy.

We have been very strong in ministering to the needs of people,  
Locally and also globally;

On the district, denominational, and ecumenical level.

We have had a strong mission orientation,  
We have sent missionaries to India, China, and Nigeria.

And not just for a few years.

If you had up the years that the missionaries,  
On the plaque in the back has served it would add up to \_\_\_.

What we have done,  
We have done well.

What we have the potential to do,  
We can also do well.

Whether this church has 50 in the pews on Sunday,  
Or 250, it is all the same,

We must embody the Spirit of Christ,  
In all of our affairs,  
Putting Jesus first, front and center,

And do his will,  
By seeking to know more and more about him,

And seeking to make his presence known and felt,  
In this, our community.

What field is ripe for the harvest?

The fields right outside our door.

God has called us by name,  
Each of us, Blaine, Judy,  
Merlin, Norma Jean, Sandy, Jeff,  
Jean, Roger, and Kevin.

We are his church. We are his people.  
God has called us by name.  
We are his!

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So what's in a name?

Someday, somehow,  
At the name of Jesus,

**Every knee should bow,  
And every tongue confess,  
That Jesus Christ is Lord,  
To the glory of God the Father (Php. 2.10-11).**