

FCCS February 10, 2018
Rev. Curran Reichert
"Each of us has a Name"

Each of Us Has A Name

By Zelda, translated by Marcia Lee Falk

Each of us has a name
given by God
and given by our parents

Each of us has a name
given by our stature and our smile
and given by what we wear

Each of us has a name
given by the mountains
and given by our walls

Each of us has a name
given by the stars
and given by our neighbors

Each of us has a name
given by our sins
and given by our longing

Each of us has a name
given by our enemies
and given by our love

Each of us has a name
given by our celebrations
and given by our work

Each of us has a name
given by the seasons
and given by our blindness

Each of us has a name
given by the sea
and given by
our death.

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This poem was written by an Israeli woman commonly known as Zelda. An artist, a teacher and insistent on reaching across boundaries that divide people and cultures. Each of us has a name.

This church has many names, First Congregational Church, a United Church of Christ, is the one on our tax documents and our sign out front. That name let's people know a lot if they know anything about mainline Christianity, but increasingly the majority of people do not know anything about mainline Christianity.

So, we use other names to talk about who we are; Earth Care and Earth Justice, Caring Friends, Open and Affirming, Social Action. Our theology is progressive, our congregation is caring and we are active in our community around issues concerning the planet and wide range of equity issues.

Then there are the nicknames that we or others have given our church, The church that shares a campus with a synagogue, or the church with the sign, the most common nickname I hear is, "Oh, that church," or "Oh, THAT church."

Just like the church, each of us has a name. There is, of course, the name on our birth certificate, but that may not be the name by which we are most commonly known. Some people may call us one thing, while others call us by a more intimate, or endearing term.

This morning I want us to think about the idea of having a true name, a name that captures who we mean to be in the world.

A name to which we are eager to respond when called.

We used to read a book to Ellis Jane about a little boy who did not know his name. In his culture a name did not belong to a person until it had been uttered by the great grandmother sea turtle and she was very shy, and unpredictable.

The story follows the little boy around his town engaging with people and animals begging them to tell him his true name. But none of the names they offer feel right to him, and it isn't until one day by the edge of the sea when the little boy had all but given up hope of ever knowing his true name, that grandmother turtle emerged from the water of the sacred ocean and sang his name aloud; Upsilamanotupilarado!

At fist, the boy resists. After all it is a difficult name, and hard to pronounce, what will others think of him. About then his grandmother shows up and joins in the singing of his name, before long the whole town is singing along. You see, they had always known his name, and finally he was ready to know it too.

The passage from Job tells a similar story;

A Reading Job 12:7-10

But ask the animals, and they will teach you;
the birds of the air, and they will tell you;
ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you;
and the fish of the sea will declare to you.

Who among all these does not know
that the hand of G-D has done this?
In the hands of Yahweh is the life of every living thing
and the breath of every human being.

The mistake we make is that often we stop too soon in our own naming process. We stop at what others call us, or what we have learned to call ourselves. But do those names reflect the glory of the Holy One that beats within our hearts?

Are those names synonymous with the name God has for us; Beloved?

Like anything important in life, our names evolve, or for some the person evolves and the name needs to change to more accurately describe the person.

When we baptize our children into the life of Christian faith the church universal, the minister always asks to family by what name will this child be called? The parents have usually thought long and hard about what they want for their child and have chosen a name accordingly.

But those names are only a starting place, aren't they?

Friends, I wonder, if grandmother turtle were to come to the edge of the sacred sea and sing to you this morning, by what name would you be called? What is the name you would be anxious to respond to, the name that both honors where you have been, and where you are going...

Each of us has a name
Given by the stars
Given by the mountains
Given by our love.

Amen