

I love being out here with the saints of St. Thomas'. There's a couple of plaques with names some of us remember fondly and newer folks have never met. There's that beautiful gate, designed by another name that's with us still but we see no longer. And then there's all of you. I remember most of your names most of the time. But there's newer names, too, and those I promise I will mess up before they cement in my mind.

Names are a funny thing, ya know? Take my dad: his legal name is Billy Richard Cato, Jr. But if you happen to be my Uncle Byron, you call him by his sibling-only nickname: Dicky Bill. He's the only one allowed to call him that. For anyone else, it'd be too familiar. Years ago, when their brother Barry died, I overheard Dad say he didn't know what would happen when Uncle Byron eventually died and there'd be no one left to call him Dicky Bill. It's not really the name, it's what it means: familiarity, shared history, love.

I've got lots of names, too. Brooks is the obvious one. Father was a weird one to get used to. But Padre G was my favorite. I became Padre G with a youth group almost entirely made up of hispanic kids. After weeks of this, I asked why Padre G instead of another letter that appeared in my actual name. They all went silent and looked at each other stifling giggles. And that's when I knew. Padre G was Padre Gringo. It's fascinating how our names connect us and carry meaning. What's in a name? In some ways, not much, but in others, there's a ton packed in. I've heard my name said with love, joy, and anger. I've heard it said with familiarity, hope, and fear. I've even heard it as a warning! A lot of thought went into the names I carry. My last name comes from my father's side. A choice was made to stay with Cato after my parents divorced and another choice when my mother remarried. My middle name is kingly and my first name comes either from my dad's best friend or a baseball legend. All that to say, what's in a name? I was almost Marcus. Why does that sound so wrong? Nothing against the Marcuses of the world, but I'm not that. I am a Brooks, whatever that means.

Looking at all these Bible stories, it's amazing how big a role names play. The first person names all the things, and his companion names the first children. Fun fact: Adam and Eve didn't get their names until they left Eden. From there on, God doles out names all the time. There's Ishmael, Jezreel, and John; Isaac, Solomon, and Lo-ammi; Moses, Jesus, and my favorite one to say, Maher-shalal-hash-baz. Each name assigned by God. Each carrying a message within its syllables. But then sometimes God goes and changes a name. Abram and Sarai become Abraham and Sarah. Jacob becomes Israel. Saul becomes Paul. And Simon becomes Peter. "Simon," by the way, meant "to be heard," which you'd think would be a great name for an apostle. But Jesus has bigger plans. Peter's now the Rock, not Dwayne Johnson, but just plain Peter, the Rock, the cornerstone. Paul ends up with his own name for Peter, the only one who calls him Cephas. It's another word for rock, the Dicky Bill of the scriptural world. Anyway, it all gets me to thinking about our names. We carry them all the time, identify each other by them, get attention, call for help, express love, make vows, say goodbye, welcome, and celebrate with them. They're there for our whole lives and all that we experience.

But there are some that aren't comfortable with their names. So, they might follow God's lead and make a change. Maybe it's time to shed a cocoon and start anew. Maybe you need to get the last vestige of a former life off your shoulders. Or maybe your name never matched who you are. These days, there's a lotta hullabaloo around all this. I've got a friend who just changed their name. They've been CJ for a long time, but it's legally done now. It's funny, the more I see CJ living fully into who he's been privately his whole life, the easier it is to get his name right. The old name's an increasingly distant memory and feels weird to associate with him. He's CJ, and anything else just sounds wrong. But he wasn't always CJ, and there are some that mourn the loss of his old name and, to them, the person he used to be. It's complicated, right? He hasn't become a new person, he's

simply been freed to live as he always has been. The removal of barriers doesn't change who you are, it makes space to become what you've always longed to be.

St. Irenaeus of Lyons has this great line that says, "The Glory of God is the human person fully alive." For many, names don't get in the way of living fully, but for some, they do. For trans friends and family especially, names carry more meaning. They can carry shame, resentment, constant reminders that you're different. You know, I'm thinking about this Gospel passage and Jesus renaming Peter and how rarely we call him Simon (or Sarah Sarai or Paul Saul). Christians, it seems, have no problem avoiding dead names when it comes to Biblical characters. We oughta be able to get this right. Jesus says, "whatever you bind on earth, you bind in heaven." Our names are bound to us, sometimes like the solid security in the spine of a book, holding us right where we're supposed to be. And sometimes they're bound like thorns, restricting every movement with a painful jab. So sometimes, a change is needed, and a name changed on earth, bound on earth changes in heaven. Names are sacred, but the changing of a name does not discard that sacredness; it shifts to a new sacredness bound to you in this world, a new sacredness bounding for the heavens. Now, I know Jesus is talking about binding in a particular way here, but my modern ears can't help but hear binding of a different sort, another way for some to make their presentation in the world fit their true selves. Fully alive and more fully themselves, the fully sacred Glory of God.

St. Thomas', you're an open crew. Y'all are excited to welcome everyone. You look for Christ in the stranger, knowing that our Body remains incomplete without the next new person and the next and the next. Keep on seeking the sacred in every person you run into and not just here. Seek the sacred in all the differences in front of you. Difference can be scary, but it's also exciting. And it shows us possible sacrednesses we'd miss otherwise. Your trans friend isn't just sacred, they are uniquely sacred. And we need them to know God more fully.

One last point, and then we can get moving towards that picnic. I mentioned Jesus talking about binding and loosing here on earth. Whatever we bind on earth is bound in heaven, and whatever we loose on earth is loosed in heaven. If you bind something in love, a sacred hug say, that love reaches all the way to the heavens. And likewise, if you constrict here, that limitation, that tamping down reaches to the heavens, too. It's time to loosen our love here. Love's not a resource to be guarded. It's a wealth to be shared. And that reaches to the heavens, too.

I don't know what the heavens do with that information, but I know this: when it comes time to lay account for my life, I don't want St. Peter to look up from that holy ledger and ask why I was so miserly with love. Love requires the ability to adapt. To loose what needs loosing, to uphold all people as sacred, to honor a new name. It is a treasure to be entrusted with God's love for humanity. Don't guard it too closely. Don't bind it up. Say its name and let it loose. For the sake of YHWH, Jehovah, Adonai, El Shaddai, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, or whatever name you use, for God's sake, let love loose.