

Matthew 10:40-42

Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple-- truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward."

Well, I hope you all have been watching the news over the past week. The long-awaited news is now public. I'm sure that you heard it, right? It was the lead story on many of the stations. Jay-z and Beyonce, known to their close friends as Bey and Jay, have named the twins! The names that they will carry with them into and through their lives are Rumi and Sir, both who will now grow up alongside their sister, Blue Ivy. They named their son, "Sir", it is thought, because they thought it would make a great Rapper name. I couldn't help but wonder what happens if he grows up to be... a dentist, or an accountant?

Of course, those names, by Hollywood standards, are relatively tame compared to some. Nicholas Cage's second son, Kal-El, is named after Superman's comic book father. Tu is the daughter of Rob Morrow. I'll give you a second to put that name together. Jermajesty Jackson, daughter of Jermaine Jackson, Apple, the daughter of Gwyneth Paltrow, Tennis pro Arthur Ashe's daughter, Camera, (her mother is a photographer) and of course for those here of my vintage, Moon Unit and Dweezil, children of rock star Frank Zappa.

Now, I know that those names are rare, but it seems to be that names today are meant to be creative labels that are chosen to make people stand out individually or to make some sort of statement by the parents. That was not the way it was in biblical times. Names were not primarily a label at all. They were not designed to differentiate and individualize, at least not primarily. They were a recognition of something more than that. Names spoke of a future mission for the child, a mission that God had brought them into the world for.

Take Jesus for example. When the angel Gabriel came to Joseph in a dream, he said, "...[Mary] will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins." It wasn't you shall call him Jesus because it sounds cool, or is trendy and cute, or it will play well in the press. Name reflected mission. He was to be named Jesus because he had a mission to fulfill. He will save people. He will bring reconciliation for people with God. In Hebrew, Yeshua, means "God Saves." It was who Jesus was, not just what he was called.

This might be more clear if we played a name change game. Whenever we hear or read “in the name of,” try changing it to, “in the mission of,” or, “in the essence of.” Let’s see how that effects things.

How about God, himself. God was sending Moses to free the Israelites from bondage and Moses asks his name, so he could explain to those who might ask. God says my name, my essence, is that I exist. Tell them “I Am” sent you. Tell them that the one God that exists, exists. Tell them that they should believe that. Tell them that the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, exists and has a mission, a mission that is forever, from generation to generation. That, by the way, is taken from Exodus chapter 3, verses 14 and 15.

In Leviticus, where much of the law was outlined, it says, “you shall not pollute the name [the essence] of your God. His holy name [His mission] shall not be profaned.” It is like when we say that we should not use the Lord’s name in vain, it is saying that we should not use God’s essence inappropriately. We should not pollute it.

David writes in Psalms, “O Jehovah, our Lord, how majestic is Your name [your essence] in all the earth! And those who know Your name [those who know your mission] will put their trust in You.

Isaiah tells of the coming messiah but more than that he shows how we will recognize him by his mission, not by his label. He says, “His name [His essence and mission} is called Wonderful Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Isaiah later describes Him even more fully, “Behold! The virgin will conceive in her womb and will bear a son, and they will call His name [they will describe His essence and His mission] as Emmanuel, God is with us.”

And He did come. He came. He was named. His mission was brought to earth. And we have been embracing and acting on that mission, we have been acting in His name, ever since. Name is mission. Name is the essence of a person, not just a label.

So, what should we make of our Gospel passage this morning? “Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple-- truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.”

Let’s continue our word switch game. Whoever receives a prophet “in the mission” of a prophet will receive what the prophet has received, which is being close to the heart of God. Whoever receives a righteous person “in the essence” of a righteousness will receive the life of the righteous. And whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones “in the essence and the mission” of a disciple, in other words, as a disciple -- truly I tell you, none of these will lose what comes to followers of Christ.

But here is the struggle. Since a name is not just a label, but rather it contains and transmits the essence of the person, it is not so simple as to do good deeds and spray paint Jesus all over it. Our actions must reflect who we follow and who we have become, not just what club in which we claim membership. We can see this clearly in Matthew 7:22 where Jesus says, "Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name do many works of power? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; depart from Me!"

Who we are must be a reflection of the name, the essence and the purpose, of who we proclaim. As James essentially tells us, "It is not by our works, but rather faith, that we are saved, but faith without works is no faith at all." We are not Christian because we have attached a label to our lives. We can only be Christians and be pleasing to God when we adopt a mission for our lives. It is when we live "in Jesus' name."

And on this long Independence Day weekend, when we remember and celebrate the life of our country, we should remember that we are not a Christian nation simply because most of our founders followed Christ. Instead, we only become a Christian nation, or not, with each generation as we embrace the Love, and the Truth, and the purpose for salvation that Jesus died for.

So, let us go forth and celebrate Independence Day and the life of our nation, *In The Name Of Christ!*

Amen