

Fifth Sunday After Pentecost
Wicker Park Lutheran Church
Rev. Jason Glombicki
June 28, 2015

Names, titles, and labels matter. We know this. Oh, we know this. With the Supreme Court's ruling on Friday we all know that the label "marriage" carries incredible weight. It carries more weight than "civil union," more than "domestic partner," and more than the simple "partner." Both sides of the issue have gone head to head over the ability to use the label "marriage" or withhold that label from a relationship. So we know that labels matter.

Yet labels, names, and titles can be equally as constraining and inaccurate. One prime related example was in a Slate article from March in which "Jordan Miller, who is a grad student in Atlanta ... described zirsself as genderqueer, transmasculine, transgender, and femme." Jordan uses these labels to get at the complexity of the self. Jordan says that "genderqueer is about acknowledging that gender expression and identity is not binary, that there are more than just two genders."¹ Jordan is making us aware that labels aren't everything.

And now while labels can be constraining and inaccurate, we also know that labels can possess power. Embracing the labels white, male, straight, American, professional, upper class, even the title "northsider" in Chicago does come with power. While often colored, female, queer, gay, lesbian,

blue collar, and south sider carry far less weight. Labels, names, and titles can carry power.

And today we get a bit of labeling going on in Mark's gospel reading. Right away it's a curious story within a story. It's a sandwich style story telling that requires us to eat the beginning and the end with middle, much like a delicious ice cream sandwich. Yet, like a mint chocolate chip ice cream sandwich, this story is filled with a surprising level of detail for our concise and pointed author.

First Jesus meets a man named Jairus – a man of status with a name, with a family, but with a daughter that is very sick. Jesus is on his way to visit this young girl but he's stopped by an encounter with some nameless woman. Mark doesn't even give her the dignity of making up a name. Instead she's only described as bleeding for 12 years. Scholars assume that it's most likely vaginal bleeding that rendered her ritually impure and unable to bear children. She is desperate for healing. After all she has no advocate, no family, no community, she is the nameless nothing who is not even worth Mark's time.

So we find that once Jesus figures out what has happened to him, which by the way is weird even for Jesus. It is only then this nameless woman steps forward in fear and trembling to confess her deed and her hope.

In that moment there's a change, a shift, something new happens in the story. It's as though Destiny's Child walks in singing their hit "say my name?" And then there, Jesus *does* say her name. Jesus names her. Jesus labels her even. Jesus gives her a title of relationship. Jesus restores her. Jesus calls her "daughter."

¹http://www.slate.com/blogs/outward/2015/03/24/genderqueer_what_does_it_mean_and_whe_re_does_it_come_from.html

This label is one of power and it's one that matters.

Now we have no idea how she reacted to that title. We don't know if she rejected it or embraced it. But what we do know is that she was made well and she was restored. She was sent in Peace.

But then the ice cream sandwich style narrative isn't over. When Jesus finally gets to the house of Jarius Jesus says "the child is not dead but asleep."

Oh they laugh at Jesus. Boy do they laugh. You see, that young girl has already been labeled "dead." So many people have bought into her label as "dead" that there are already paid mourners weeping and wailing outside. And so the crowd laughed at Jesus when he tried to change this girl's destructive label.

You see, David Lose notes that, "Names – whether nicknames or some other descriptor – are convenient because they work to summarize a lot of things into one element. But they are also dangerous because they reduce us, strip us of our individuality and uniqueness, and label us according to what someone else sees."

And we know that labels can be destructive. We see people labeled by the color of their skin, we see folks labeled because of whom they love, and we see individuals labeled because of how they appear. We see the world creating borders and boundaries to distinguish and describe who is in and not. We see labels and words used as tools of power. But then we see our God cross those boundaries and break them open. Today we see Jesus recognize "unique persons, each created in the image of God, and each worthy of our attention, care, love and respect."

So on this Sunday where we celebrate the inclusivity of all people. On this Sunday where we remember that back in January of 2006 we as a church made the public affirmation that all are welcome. At that meeting this church knew only one single state had marriage equality, and now today we gather knowing all 50 states finally have marriage equality. On that day when we became a Reconciling in Christ congregation and *this* day we still stand behind our commitment. We know that with labels of gender identity or sexual orientation along with the ways you self identify or don't, there is absolutely nothing that separates you from God's love and presence in this community of people. You are a beloved child of God. God's action is one of reconciliation – an action of being brought together and made whole. You are reminded that our God makes wholeness out of division. That our God steps over boundaries and labels, and that our God sees you just the way you are.

In baptism we are reminded of who we really are. In baptism you are reminded that you are a child of God. In your baptism you were promised that no matter what happens, no matter where you go in life, no matter what you do or have done, you are always seen as a unique and beloved individual. And each week we come here to be reminded of that. To be reminded that when the world pummels us down, when workplace discrimination for LGBTQ individuals is still federally legal, when our very own rainbow flags have been stolen from the front of the church, when gay men cannot give blood because of a decades old stigma, and when our world lacks many

gender-neutral bathrooms,² there's still nothing separating you from our God. You are loved the way you are. You are welcomed in this place.

So on this day, I hope that you've really gotten the point of all of the things I've said. If not, here it is. We as a people and as a nation are in a complex place in our country. We've seen the tragedies of discrimination, hate, and racism weighing us down. Yet in the midst of that I pray that we can take a brief moment to rejoice in the hope of justice and reconciliation. To remember that boundaries are broken by our God and the world is restored. For us to pause for a moment today to remember our God reaching across boundaries and labels to welcome an unnamed woman as a family member to give her a label of power. And today we also to pause in awe of Jesus touching a young girl and shattering the labels of death and destruction. Today our God reminds us that labels and boundaries are no barriers. Our God is with you, by your side, lifting you up saying "my child, get up and eat." Amen.

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http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/06/26/employee-non-discrimination_n_7671726.html