

A Service of Renaming
Sponsored by Come and Listen Interfaith Group
Hosted by Maryland Presbyterian Church
Sunday, April 16, 2023

Revised 3/23/2023

WELCOME

You created my inmost being and stitched me together in my parent's womb. For all these mysteries I thank you — for the wonder of myself, for the wonder of your works — my soul knows it well.” – Psalm 139:13-14 (*The Inclusive Bible*)

We recognize that changing one's name can be one of the most meaningful steps for a transgender or gender non-conforming person in expressing or validating who they are. It can also be meaningful for persons who are changing their name due to a significant life event such as a divorce or coming of age. In Scripture, names have great power; name changes reflect true revelation (for example, Abraham, Sarah, Jacob and Paul).

Today, we are offering a renaming ceremony to mark this important moment, to acknowledge the past and to look forward to the future. We invite you to be a part of lifting up and offering support to those who claim a new name.

OPENING ACCLAMATION

Leader: Blessed be the God of Sarai revealed as Sarah, Jacob who became Israel, and Simon called Peter.

People: Blessed be the God who comes among us, reconciles us, and sets us free.

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 32:22-28 (NIV)

Hear these words of Holy Scripture:

22 That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. 23 After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. 24 So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. 25 When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. 26 Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak."

But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

27 The man asked him, "What is your name?"

"Jacob," he answered.

28 Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome."

INVITATION

As a people of God, we gather to mark sacred and holy milestones together in community. Whether it is a baptism, wedding ceremony, confirmation, bar mitvah, or bat mitvah, we believe that it is important to honor the journeys we experience together, as God's gathered people. Today is such a day. Today we celebrate in a ritual of naming for several of God's beloved children.

Names are an interesting part of what it means to be human. Throughout history cultures have developed different rituals of naming. While we in the states may be most familiar with a line written on a birth certificate by biological parents, the practices worldwide are as numerous as the stars in the sky.

Names are also an interesting part of our story of Abrahamic faith. In making a promise of a new nation God renames Abram to Abraham. In the birth of a new child, God renames Sarai to Sarah. Through a night long wrestling match, God renames Jacob to Israel. After a period of great loss and upheaval, Naomi, which means sweet, changes her own name to Mara, which means bitter. After a life altering experience of the risen Christ, Saul becomes Paul.

Today, we celebrate a new name, a deeper truth, in a journey just beginning.

RITUAL OF NAMING

(Using dissolvable paper, pens, flat stones about 2", permanent markers, a stirring rod, and a clear bowl with water)

I invite you each to write on one of these pieces of paper whatever you want to say about or to your old identity. It can be your old name, a word, a picture, a letter to your old identity, or you can just leave it blank. When you are finished, then fold the paper over (Hand out paper and pens).

I also have a stone for you. Write your new, chosen name on the stone and place it in the water. (Hand out stones and permanent markers).

Beloved ones, on each piece of paper is a representation of your old identity. It served you well for many years, but now we recognize a new part of your journey. (Take the papers and place them in the water. Stir and wait for papers to disappear). This paper may dissolve, but our memories of you never will. This water is forever changed.

The image of baptism is powerful, a new life in Christ being cleansed by the water. Much as some of us have been washed by the water of baptism and have been named as God's beloved children, we invite you, as God's beloved child, to take your new name out of the water. Now, this stone may appear to be solid and permanent. But we know that rocks change as the water

around them changes. The texture, the shape, all change as the flowing waters change. You, your identity, and your purpose will continue to grow, change, and be transformed.

We now take this water with your old identities that have nourished you to this day. We return them to the earth, to history, to the circle of life, that they may provide nourishment for the new things that God will grow. (Pour water on ground)

In the next section, we invite each of you to say your name and your preferred pronouns. You are also welcome to say a few words about why you have chosen your new name.

(The next part is done for each person individually)

By what name shall you be known, and what are your pronouns? N. (Each person says their name). Is there anything you would like to say about your name and what it means to you? (person speaks briefly, if desired)

Beloved Child of God, your name is good. May it reflect your true self, empowering you to live a life of love and justice.

Gathered family and community, will you do all in your power to walk with N., empowering him/her/them to live a life of love and justice as he/she/they is/are wonderfully and beautifully made? If so, please say, we will with the help of God.

We will with the help of God.

Laying on hands – N., beloved, beautiful child of God, though your name may be changed, the spirit of the most high God continues to dwell within you. Go forward from this day with your new name and with our love, as we affirm that you are beautifully and wonderfully made.

(Do this separately for each person.)

WELCOME AND RECEPTION

Let us, this community of mutual love and support, express our welcome and commitment to you, using the words in your handout:

People: We affirm our continued walk with you in the common life of this community. We promise you our ongoing friendship and prayers as we share the hopes and labors of the work we are called to do. May we continue to grow together in God's knowledge, love, and service, and be witnesses of acceptance and empowerment for all people.

PRAYER

Let us pray – Eternal God, we praise you for calling us to be your servant people and for gathering us into this community. We thank you for sending to us these beloved creations of yours, that we may work together in serving the needs of others. Amen.

Go in peace, beloved members of our family.

Primary sources:

Ritual of Naming & Affirmation of Baptism

Developed by Rev. Sandra Summers

Memorial Congregational Church (UCC), Sudbury, MA MCCSudbury.org

A Service of Renaming, Book of Occasional Services, Episcopal Church

Other Resources:

<https://serenityhome.wordpress.com/2014/05/29/a-transgender-naming-ceremony/>

<http://www.manyvoices.org/blog/resource/transgender-renaming-service/>

United Church of Christ Book of Worship

<https://ritualwell.org/?s=transgender>