

May the words on my lips, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you O God, our rock and our redeemer. *Amen*

There's power in naming.

The one who does the naming has the power over that which is being named.

Think about the power that God bestowed upon Adam. In the 2nd account of creation, after man became a living creature. God thought that it was not good for "man to be alone; so God formed companions, every animal of field, air and sea. God brought them to the man to see what he would name them. But God recognized the need for human companionship too and woman was formed as well, bone from bone. (Gen 2:7-23)

To name something, or someone is to impose an identity; for better or worse. Humans have learned the hard way that sometimes, that assigned identity isn't always a good fit. And an individual may claim a new name or new identity to better reflect who one actually is.

Jesus spent a lot of prayerful time discerning his own identity. People everywhere had an opinion about who Jesus is. In this rare moment, Jesus opens up, seeking to understand what identity others are assigning to him.

It also offers a glimpse into our Lord's quest to empower those closest to him, by asking his disciples *to name him*. But they can't. They don't dispute the crowds 'take' on Jesus. They have not drunk deeply enough from the well, to say with any certainty, who is Jesus. That is, all but one. Peter.

And in keeping with my theological take on Newton's 3rd law, Peter's confession, naming Jesus as the Messiah - the Christ, provokes an equal and opposite reaction only moments later, when Peter earns a harsh rebuke, "get behind me Satan!" Stay tuned for next week's episode, unpacked by your local preacher Tom Ward!

But for now, Peter gets it right. "You are the Messiah!" And the reward for that? Peter finds out *his* true identity. It isn't actually Simon, son of Jonah. Jesus names him, Peter – the rock on which Jesus will build God's church.

Peter was born for this! In a way, Peter has been liberated to enter fully into whom he's always been. Every single human has been formed in the image of God. Yet, how many are liberated and freed, each to become whom they were destined to be?

In this passage, Jesus self-identifies as the *Son of Man*, and in naming himself as such, he claims to belong to *all* of humanity. AND, when Peter names Jesus as the Messiah, the son of the *living* God, Jesus affirms that too! Jesus has the strength and the power, the confidence to be ALL of whom he ever was, is or will be. He belongs to God, he belongs to us and we to him.

But this knowledge that Peter has just named, inextricably connected to self-sacrificing power is not to be handed out like candy to the masses. This kind of divine insight and knowledge can only come through true spiritual insight and interior understanding. It can't be apprehended by listening to the evening news. It can't be obtained by a twitter newsfeed. It can't be fed to you by a preacher, although many try.

Knowing Christ, deeply and personally is the only way to grab hold of those keys to the kingdom that Jesus has given to Peter. Only you can name Jesus as Lord. Of course, I'll share what I know, but in the end, it's up to you.

Okay, I may be dating myself here, but I remember riding the Merry-Go-Round at fairs. Perching just right upon one of the brightly painted steeds, I could grab the shiny gold-toned ring as I passed round and round, which then entitled me to repeat the ride. And I wanted it!

We've got to want to grab those keys! Why? To get past those gates that threaten to keep us apart, from God and one another! The kingdom of heaven isn't locked against would-be-trespassers! Remember, the Messiah has come to set us free! Jesus wants to give us those keys to escape from the self-made, sometimes inflicted/imposed prison cells which we find ourselves beating against.

It isn't just the 'world' that erects barricades, barring our way to discovering our true, God-given identity. Religious institutions have been pretty adept at it too, then and now. In Jesus' time, the pharisees sought to lock out the commoners, but He's just handed Peter the keys, and Peter's got work to do now. Because the power that comes with naming is the self-emptying, love-bearing, downward way of Christ.

Jesus wants to know what binds us. What's keeps us from entering heaven, here on earth? And he wants for us to let it go, to be free, to enable us to be our truest selves. Here, he offers these words of wisdom to Peter, "Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, Whatever you loose on earth, will be loosed in heaven."

Put another way, in the gospel according to John, “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” (Jn 20:23) We might translate that in the Lord’s Prayer as: Help us to release that which binds us and others, as you yourself have released us from that which binds.

Many who suffer from addictions have tapped in the power of naming the problem to claim health and wholeness. To name our fears and foes, to admit out loud and to one another the obstacle, the rock that blocks the door, gives us the power to confront it and move on, to take away the power it has over us.

Therefore, I urge us brothers and sisters in Christ, to name that which binds, and to name the one who sets us free, that the gates of Hell will not prevail, and we claim our belovedness, that has always been and always will be, through Christ our Lord, Amen!

Amma Susan