

*Names matter.* The reason my granddaughter Ruthie Virginia has those names is because *Ruth* was my mother's middle name and *Virginia* was my father's mother's name (who incidentally lived in Virginia). And also on my daughter-in-law's side--both of those names are in her family too. So it was a serendipitous discovery of these names held in common which led to Ruthie Virginia being the names *that seemed meant to be*. Each of us probably has their own story of how their name came to be. And if it was only that your parents *liked* your name—then that is also enough—*because it was their gift to you*.

Now, sometimes, the actual meaning of a name is also insightful. My name “Miles” variously means “soldier”, “servant”, or “merciful”. Maybe at least the “servant” part fits? My first name “Gary” seems to mean something like “spear-bearer” which is not so obvious. Both of my names surprisingly have Norman Viking origins. If you don't know the etymological origins of your names it can be interesting to google them and see what's there and whether they fit your sense of self.

*Names are important in the Bible—and the meaning of names there are also significant.* And this is especially so when it comes to God and Jesus. Christians even have this curious habit, when you think about it, of praying, by saying things like “In the Name of Jesus we pray” or “In your Name we pray”. In the Collect of the Day, we even prayed that God would “graft in our hearts the *love of your Name*”—which is a strange thing to say, when you think about it.

And yet, if you love or care about someone—in your experience, isn't that person inseparable from their name? To *say their name* is not like giving that person a number to go by, rather, *the name itself is infused with your sense of that person*. And even now, to bring to mind the name of...your mother or father...is it not to bring to mind...your whole sense of them, a world of experience with them, their undying reality?

And so, you can imagine that *the name of God in the Bible is very, very important*. And it is surprisingly easy to completely miss the fact that, in the Bible, *God actually has a name*. Our word “god” is not really a name but a kind of generic descriptor which apparently means “to call upon a power”. So it does not really tell us anything at all about that power you are calling upon—which is why the word “god” can just as easily apply to Zeus...or Thor...money...or power itself. The Bible however gets much more specific.

In this story of Moses in Exodus 3, *God actually reveals God's name* to Moses. And as best we can understand, God's name in English is actually this: “I AM WHO I AM”. God's name is a mysterious *phrase*. And so when Moses was to go on his mission for this God, he could say, in short, “I AM has sent me to you”. Now this is an exceedingly strange name that has endlessly inspired theologians and philosophers. And it is a name which cannot be simply pigeon-holed by any human being into some kind of category that we can simply define and use however we like—because this God is beyond all such things. And yet--and here's the other shocker—this great “I AM” *heard the cries of the slaves* that were then in Egypt and was sending Moses there to free them. No other god in the ancient world gave a wit for enslaved people—they were just things to use. “I AM” did care—and does.

Which then brings us to the other great name in the Bible. The name of Jesus. The name of which it is said in the New Testament, that this “I AM” bestowed upon this one man—“the name before which every knee shall bow, in heaven, on earth, and under the earth” (Philippians 2:9-11). While Jesus' name is very familiar to us, since it comes from the great “I AM”, there is equally as much mystery that surrounds the name and person of Jesus. And once again there is a revelation in Jesus of a tremendous mercy.

It is hard to abuse the name of the great “I AM” because most people don't even know it. But it is easy to abuse—or be embarrassed by--the name of Jesus. However, if we realize where that name really comes from--from the great mystery in and beyond the world, the great “I AM”—then the name of Jesus may also give us pause to recognize...that his name upon our lips is...a holy gift.