

*We may have more than one name. We may have a spiritual name
that expresses a role we have with friends, family and the world.
It could be spectacular although probably not – and we often realize it by observing
where our passion lies and what we do with our lives.*

I'm catching up with much of life today – with regard to listening.

I got an iPod for Christmas.

I am learning to live with these little cords hanging around me -
ready to go into my ears when its time to shut out the world and listen to the music
or computer or radio podcasts - I understand I can send to this thing.

One thing this new gadget is – however – is something that involves a new password -
one more password – to get my iTunes account – and download music.

Anyone else tired of passwords?

Anyone get a Christmas gift that involves another password?

Anyone here have a good way of remembering your passwords?

Every time we sign into a protected system we must provide certain information
so that the system knows - we are who we say we are.

The highest level security systems rely on biological secret names
held by each one of us - like in retinal scans - fingerprint analysis -
or even specific DNA matches. That's pretty personal.

But for those systems with passwords, if you don't know your "password" -
the system won't let you in.

The techies tell us to use cryptic number-letter combinations - totally random –
and with sufficient length. Good luck with that.

When I try that - I spend a lot of time sending those emails -
asking to resend or reset my password.

Then I feel silly – as if I can't remember my own name – which – obviously – I can't.



We could think of it another way –
and that is that we need our "secret name" to personalize us,

to make some kind of sense to us, to identify something unique about us.

Maybe a personal password - with its' secret meaning just for us -

takes away some of the anonymity of the internet.



But the ultimate identifier for each one of us has not been mapped out.

The secrets locked in our heart and mind -

the honesty of our words and the motivations behind all our actions.

These are locked deep within us.

The Greek word "psyche" is usually translated as 'soul,"

but can also mean "life."

Our soul-life still keeps its secrets.

We don't have the ability to scan that.



We do have another identifier – maybe more than one.

This identifier would be more like that which

Mary was given by the angel Gabriel.

He called her "God's favored one."

And like the name Simeon in our story today gave Jesus.

Simeon called him "the Lord's Messiah."

These names – these spiritual names - express more about purpose.

So – in addition to our public name – and we may have other names -

that we learn later – from insight – and what happens in our lives.

Others may tell us because they see it in us -

or we may learn it by what we come to love

and be passionate about.



Today's gospel has the public declaration of Jesus' name -

the name revealed by the angel Gabriel to Mary.

The name “Jesus” in Hebrew means “Yahweh saves.”

It’s often pronounced “Joshua.”¹

It is not an unusual name. It is quite a common name.

So this most extraordinary birth in history comes with a very ordinary name.



We often have common names.

And we may have spiritual names too.

Those are names that describe not what we are called by the world
but what we are – what we bring to the world – what we are called to be – or do.

It may reflect our passion and our compassion.

For it’s related to who we are in a spiritual way.

Here is something for a new year’s resolution –

to try and discover our spiritual names.

How might we do that?

First, I don’t think it we find our spiritual name by going inward,
by navel-gazing (so to speak) and being focused on ourselves -
at least for very long.

Second, I think we find it -
by what we have thrown ourselves into the world about.

It may be something we feel called to.

It may not be spectacular – just a sense of desire – of doing our part.

And, it will bring some joy when it’s part of your life.



To go back to the story -
there were astounding events surrounding Jesus’ birth.
But this young family did not move into the temple
and settle into a lifestyle of the religious elite.

They went home to life in an ordinary town –
and Jesus learned a trade at Joseph’s side.

We know little about their life – but it appears to have been quite ordinary.

And - he grew strong and in wisdom.

And in that way we are told the favor of God rested upon him.

But he had been given this other name by Simeon -
and someday it would begin to shine through.

Jesus didn't bring fourth this new name and identity until he was a man.

There are a few stories out there about the child Jesus
having some extraordinary gifts
but for the most part – from the little we know – he was a typical child in a family.

It was after he went into the wilderness and wrestled with his own demons
and personal growth issues – like we all have – I believe -
that he began to grow into his greater role.

He was surely even doing that in the Garden of Gethsemane – before his death.

So it was not something he completed but perhaps kept following -
that spiritual name – the Messiah – came alive in his life.

Like I said - the spiritual name shows by how you
throw yourself into the needs of the world.

It will be your passion connected to your action -
that will most likely reveal who you are – in a spiritual way.



Malcolm Gladwell has a new book out, and it's called "Outliers: The Story of Success."

He says that if you want to be a success in your passion - whatever your passion is -
you must be willing to invest ten thousand hours of practice
to take your passion from pastime to success.²



Some of you may know the young organist Felix Hell.

He first played here when he was about 14.

He was here this past summer in a recital series we sponsored.

He has gone from what many said was a child prodigy now to a world class musician.

We were talking before his recital this summer.
He said he did not pay a lot of attention to the “child prodigy” talk,
he said it is mainly a lot of work.
He would be one who has given the ten thousand hours.

I expect if we ever clocked time spent watching TV, or playing video games, or texting,
or listening to our iPods, or even skiing, we might be surprised.
Ten thousand hours spent on these pursuits aren't going to reveal
the kind of secret names that might be there for us in the bigger picture.
But they are not necessarily wasted.
They may be the recreation and rest to balance
the many other hours spent in giving to the world in other ways.



Well, I can't say how accurate Gladwell may be about the ten thousand hours –
but perhaps some of you may. Because you may have done it and you may have
followed your passion until it has come alive in a way that enriches the world around you -
and given you a name beyond the one on your driver's license.

The names need not be extreme – the best of anything.
A name might be something like “the giving and forgiving one.”
A name might be “the one to bring fun,” or the “playful one.”
A name might be “touches of kindness here and there,”
or “always a surprise.”
It might be something like “a mother to all” or “the dad we all need.”
Look at your life – your desires – what you love to do – and it will be revealed to you.



This message today –
all began in the story of what happened when the baby
whose birth we celebrated a few days ago –

went to Jerusalem and the temple – and was given his name.
That was also the day – as the story is told – that a man named Simeon
came and rejoiced at the sight of this little boy.
For Simeon seemed to know already that another name for this child would be Messiah.
This is what he had waited to see. He said his life was then complete.
Perhaps he was a “name giver” of a special kind.



If this story can compel us – perhaps it can compel us in this way -
to draw out of us some new names
that help us move into the deeper callings of our lives.
They may be talents – that we give hours to – maybe ten thousand – maybe one thousand.
The idea is to give ourselves over to something that touches the world’s wounded places
and brings healing, health, justice or peace
to somewhere it is needed.
It may be our life work – our vocation – but it may be a hobby – an avocation -
something we make time for because it calls us in a way we can’t explain.



So if there is some kind of ultimate “password” – or perhaps “soul scan” we will have it down.
We will have lived it and known it well.
And we will have made great meaning of our lives.
May you be more aware of some of your names -
that help you be more aware of things you do and who you are
as you go through this amazing adventure called life - and all its passwords.
Amen.

¹ Leonard Sweet

² Gladwell, Malcolm (Google)