

Many of you have heard this story, but it's one of my favorites in my family's lore, one of the ones that gets told over and over again because it makes us chuckle. I'm *fairly* certain I've never used in a sermon before, and if I have, I apologize, but it's the main story that's been in my head this week as I've been rolling the lessons over in my head.

When my grandpa passed away there was this kind of amusingly sweet moment where several people saw the obituary and told us that they wondered immediately, "Who in the world is *Erwin* Toburen?" It was a legitimate question, because very few people in the world actually knew that Erwin Toburen was my grandpa. No one called him by that name, except for my grandma who would belt it out when she was either really mad or wanting to be a bit cute. Either way, you knew she really wanted to get his attention, for good or for bad, when the Erwin came out of her mouth. She was the only one who could get away with it. To the rest of the world, my grandpa was Pete, and this is where the family lore comes in a bit, he was Pete for his entire life because of his second grade teacher.

Let's be real, Erwin is just not a name any kid wants, and my grandpa *was not* a fan. He looked at his other brothers—Charles, Frederick, Chuck and Fritz, respectively, Jim, and Clyde—and he wondered how he, the youngest, got stuck with the *weirdest* name, which had no rhyme or reason

to it. He wasn't named after anyone, there was no logic behind it, he simply just ended up with Erwin...until the second grade. Legend has it that my grandpa's second grade teacher looked at him and declared that he didn't look like an Erwin, he looked like a Pete, and from that day on, that's who my grandpa was. He was Pete, and let me tell you, he looked like a Pete. That's who everyone in town knew. No one had any clue who Erwin Toburen was, but Pete Toburen, that was a name they knew. That was the name that stuck, all because his second grade teacher decided to give my grandpa a whole new name, one that he actually liked, that fit him deeply.

The truth of the matter is that there is deep power in naming things. There always has been. There is power in knowing someone else's name. It puts you in the position of being able to call out to them, to put them in a position of response, of drawing attention to them in ways that are beyond their control. You know someone's name and it gives you a certain level of authority over them, particularly if they don't know you're name. We've all had that awkward dinner party moment, where someone knows who you are but you have *no clue* who they are, and there's that stretched out silence where you are desperately trying to get back to a level playing field, but you can't because they know you're name and you are powerless to respond until they tell you theirs. To be able to name someone is to boast of power over

it, authority, control, a deep advantage that can be used however you see fit depending on the moment. Something that Jesus learned intensely in our gospel lesson this morning.

Our gospel picks up right where last week's left off. Jesus is just starting out and getting his feet underneath him with his public ministry. He's called the first disciples so he has a little bit of a posse with him to get things started, but now, he needs a broader audience to see, to hear what he's all about. His thought process seems logical, simple...he'll start in a local synagogue. He'll have a captive audience of people who know the scriptures and are invested in their journey with God. He'll go in, he'll teach, he'll make it clear through his words that he is bringing a different word, a different perspective, a different relationship with God than they are used to, but it won't be controversial. It's a baby step, a small, tiny shot across the bow of the traditional Jewish authorities that a new day has dawned and everyone needs to be prepared that the kingdom has come, and he is about to turn the world upside down.

Initially, this plan works *beautifully*. He goes in, he teaches, and people are astounded. He has taught them in ways no one has ever taught them before. Immediately, the people recognize this is something different than what they're used to. He doesn't teach like the scribes. This isn't same

old, same old. This is a new word of God that seems to be coming for them. The first waves of whispers about this Jesus of Nazareth would have begun immediately after the service let out, *if* that's where things had ended. Instead, those whispers were probably more akin to shouts because Jesus' plan gets thrown entirely out of whack by the emergence of a man with an unclean spirit who stands up right in the middle of his teaching and declares for everyone to hear just who Jesus is and what he's going to be about.

His voice rings out in the synagogue daring Jesus to declare who he is, to state his purpose in arriving in the world, "What have you to do with *us*, Jesus of Nazareth?" Here is our first instance of naming Jesus. This spirit knows who he is as a human being and dares to ask what he has to do with the evil in the world. Then he answers the question for Jesus, "Have you come to destroy us?" It's a push, a nudge, you there, Jesus. Tell these people you have come to destroy the evil forces of the world, to break the bonds of those in chains, to be a voice for the oppressed. Then he ups the ante, "*I* know who you are, the Holy One of God." And there it is. In that moment, this spirit dares to claim authority over Jesus, declaring for all the synagogue to hear just who Jesus is. He isn't just Jesus of Nazareth, he's the Holy One of God, with power over evil, a person who evil recognizes as a threat, and in that moment, the spirit is daring Jesus to tell the truth, to lay it

all out there or deny it, to show his cards right at the beginning of his ministry when people might not be ready for it or deny who he is and lose all credibility from here on out. And how does Jesus respond? He tells the spirit to be silent, to not speak his name, to not utter another word. The world isn't ready yet, and he will not have his hand forced by a spirit not of this world. Evil doesn't get to dictate Jesus' agenda or define who he is and what he's going to be about in this his Father's kingdom. Jesus will determine those things. Jesus will say who he is and show who he is, when he's ready, when God's people are ready, and no one else gets to take that from him. His name is his own and everyone else can be silent. Jesus wrestled back control by silencing the demons and casting them out, a recognition that at the end of the day *he* was the one with power over the forces of evil, not the other way around.

More often than not, I think we very easily get caught in this same trap, this same trap of being the ones feeling as though we're in the position of naming who Jesus is, what he is about, and who has come for, rather than letting Jesus and the gospel speak for itself. The gospel tells us exactly who Jesus is: the light of the world who came to free the oppressed from the bonds of power that sought to chain them down, the Messiah come for those at the fringes of society who had been overlooked for too long, the healer

come for the sick and the lost and the forgotten, the voice for the voiceless, the one come to turn the oppressive powers of the world upside down. Yet, we spend so much of our time trying to tell people who Jesus is based on our own definitions. We try to fit Jesus into our own boxes of what we want him to look and sound like. We name Jesus with all of our own caveats attached to that name. We say oh you're name is Jesus, Savior of the whole world. You don't *look* like the Savior of the whole world, so we're going to call you the Savior of only those we like and deem worthy.

Instead of wasting all of our time, naming who Jesus is and seeking to have control over who God is in the world and how God operates, we would be better off spending our time doing what Jesus did: naming the *evils* of the world and thus seeking to find a way to grasp power and authority over them. Jesus is who Jesus is and there is nothing we can do to control or change that. But the evil of the world? When we name that, when we look it in the eye and say who it is? That is something we can have power over and try our hardest to fight against and change. Instead of trying to have authority over Jesus, an impossible feat, let's try to have some authority over those things which in our world would seek to shackle us and stop our voices and keep us from rising up to face them and destroy them. Jesus saw evil and named it and so must we.

Naming the evils of this world brings them into the light and forces us to face them, rather than letting them lurk in the shadows where they thrive on our inability or our lack of desire to see them and acknowledge their presence. They thrive off of our fear and off of our complacency. Only once we name them, acknowledge them, can we put ourselves in the position of saying they don't get to rule us anymore, and let's face it this world has a *heap* of evil which must be named for what it is: white supremacy and the abhorrent racism it thrives upon, greed and the selfish individualism that grows from that, the twisted tangle that is nationalism, xenophobia, and terrorism, the thorns of prejudice which plague our hearts in sexism, classism, homophobia, and religious intolerance, the rampant poverty we want to ignore so we don't have to help our neighbor, the faceless bullying and antagonizing of an ever-increasing world of social media. By naming these things, we suck a tiny bit of their power away because we say we see you and will not tolerate you anymore. By naming these things, we put ourselves in a position of authority and control, *if* we wish to control them and change them. By naming these things, we dare to look at our world and say you don't *look* like the kingdom of God, but one day, when we have named the evil within you and told it to be silent, once we have wrested it's control away...it will. **AMEN!!!**