January 15, 2017

Readings: Isaiah 49:1-7

Psalm 40:1-12

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

John 1:29-42

Deep Breath prayer

Amen.

My anxiety has been at an all-time high lately.

I notice it bumps a bit the closer we get to

Friday, January 20, to Inauguration Day.

Is anyone else having this problem? Waking in the middle of the night – wondering which country has been insulted by tweets during the night. Having nightmares – dreams about chaos and mayhem.

My plan for this sermon did not include reference to the President-elect, but I grew up ignoring an elephant in the living room and to ignore the tension that many of us are feeling right now would be unwise and silly.

I am afraid. I am afraid of what will happen January 21. I’m afraid of tweets that could start a war. I’m afraid of the financial fall out that will come with the repeal of the ACA, of Obamacare. I’m afraid of what might happen to Medicare and Social Security or my teacher’s pension as a result of what other catastrophe might happen. I’m afraid for my nieces, for my female friends who are in their 20’s and 30’s if women’s health concerns are swept under the rug and not included in this “replace” they keep talking about. I’m afraid.

How about you? Are you afraid?

Well - We heard some good news here today. We heard:

*The Lord called me before I was born, while I was in my mother’s womb he named me.*

Think about that. The Divine knew our names before we were born. We are so important to our Creator, to the Divine purpose, that we were known before we were even born. Imagine that. Let that idea just fill you, fill you with something stronger than fear.

Naming is such an intimate process and quite serious work. It may seem ordinary enough, but it is extraordinary in scope, a name being an identifier of the holder, an ideal, of sorts, to embrace or shrug off. I remember the challenge of naming my own children. Their father and I debated and debated, going through one baby book of names after another. Even though we were of the Age of Aquarius generation, neither one of us was interested in Sunshine or Moonbeam. There was one name we agreed on right away. If the new baby was a boy, his name would be Matthew. If the baby was a girl, well, here we went through a variety of names – Andrea was our first choice. I don’t know if this was our choice or that of an auntie who kept sending names. Then we struck upon Beth – lovely name for sure. We were still thinking Beth when I headed to the hospital for the birth, although I was not convinced Beth was quite right. That afternoon, waiting in my room, (no labor for me – it was straight to Caesarian), I said, “Elizabeth. It has to be Elizabeth.” And the name was set.

Most of us probably know how we got our names. Maybe we’re named after an aunt or uncle or beloved grandparent. Perhaps there’s a family name that’s passed down generation to generation and you’re a junior or third or fourth. Maybe your name is one of the top 10 popular names for your generation or perhaps your parents were part of the Age of Aquarius and your name reflects that era.

I love the story about how I was named. I’m 5th of 8 children. The birth two years before mine was tragic. The baby, my brother, Giles Henry, both family names, died 2 days after he was born with underdeveloped lungs. My birth was greatly anticipated because of this tragedy. Even my older siblings, 10, 12 and 13 years older, had been impacted by the loss of Giles and were excited about a new sibling. My family had experience quite of a bit of trauma the years pervious to my birth – coming out of a World War, losing a baby. Both my mother and father lost their fathers within this time, right before my conception and birth. They’d also moved from Miami Beach to Seattle, probably following some dream or scheme of my father’s.

It was actually my older sister, Carroll, named after grandmother’s maiden name, who was charged with naming the new baby. The story, as I’ve been told, is that my father called the house from the hospital and told my sisters and brother a new Christmas present had arrived. Carroll, the namer, ran to the parish church, St. Ann’s on Queen Ann hill, in Seattle, and asked her favorite nuns to help her with the naming. After much discussion, they decided on Catherine, for St. Catherine of Sienna, a Doctor of the early church and Lucille, for the martyr, St. Lucy. So, Catherine Lucille I became. It turns out there’s also some family naming here as well – my maternal grandmother was Caithryn and my paternal grandmother was Lucinda. My mother also carried Lucille as part of her name. So I was named after saints and ancestors – all strong women. So much to live up to.

When we participate in this ordinary ritual, this playing with names, the naming process of adding an identity, a personal identity to a new human, or a pet, or even a car, we are entering a Divine process. We are connecting with the Divine field, the field that already knows the name, the perfect name, the name that draws in intimacy, and connection, and love. This name will be whispered in moments of love, yelled in moments of joy, called out in moments of fear. It is in performing this ordinary task that we connect most intimately with God, with the Divine, with our Creator.

In the Gospel, we heard John the Baptist call out, “Look, here is the Lamb of God”, a name we Christians hold most dear, one of the many names for Jesus that we pray each Sunday. As a matter of fact, the reading from Isaiah this week includes several other names for Jesus - The Redeemer of Israel, Holy One, Holy One of Israel, Light to the Nations. Susan Barle gave me a lovely devotional book last month, *Fragments of your Ancient Name* by Joyce Rupp. Each day there is a short poem that honors one of the 365 names for the Divine Joyce discovered through her life’s journey. Imagine 365 names. Names like Guiding Star and Lantern of Love, or Abba, or Allah fill me with such joy, such wonder, such peace. I’ve started looking for Divine names, even making some up each day to add to my growing list – Breaker of Dawn, Puppy Love, Song of the Bird, each name expressing an aspect of the Divine that I encounter during the day.

So – that’s my plan, my plan to cope with the uncertainty that surrounds me, surrounds us today. My plan is to look for those moments when Divine presence is obvious in my day. I do not want to live my life in continual fear. I do not want to slip into anger and rage because of feelings of powerless about what is happening to my country, my friends, my family, my fellow citizenry. I want to be aware, but I don’t want to add to the pool of drama by making it all so big I am overwhelmed. Each day, I will sit at my prayer table, gazing at the breaking dawn, meditating on the Name of the day. I will gaze out at my garden, at rest in the winter chill, and remind myself - *The Lord called me before I was born, while I was in my mother’s womb he named me.*

I pray that you will join me – sometime during the day – that you will stop and pay attention to the Divine that is moving in, with, and through that very moment, that you will remember that you were known before you were born, that you were named while still in your mother’s womb. Nothing can break that bond. Nothing.

Amen.