

“Name It”

On Monday or Tuesday after the tornado, several of us were going through the debris on what was left of the stage at the church. The altar was in splinters. We found the brass cross, it's right here, we dug some more and found some of the musical instruments, we had actually found the candlesticks from the altar on Sunday night and took them down to the kids wing to provide light for the triage down there. But Monday as we went through the debris on stage, Pastor Ben found the Bible that usually sat on the altar. It's a little pocket Bible... A lot was blown away, but the Bible was not far from where it sat on the altar. Ben picked it up and it was wet and the pages curled and a bit torn, but it was open to this passage from Ecclesiastes.

“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain, a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

“What does the worker gain from his toil? I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil-- this is the gift of God. I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him” (Ecclesiastes 3:1-14).

God continues to speak to us. This passage reminds us again to set what has happened in a larger context. And two weeks after the tornado, I think it's very important for us to name some things. In the Old Testament there is sense that naming something connects you to it. If you knew someone's name, you had a connection to them, a spiritual bond. If a stray dog, or God forbid cat, follows you home. What happens as soon as you name it? There's a bond, a connection. When I was in seminary the family I lived with had a hobby farm. They had bought a bull that they intended to (what's the nice way to put this) turn into steaks some day. The problem was they gave that bull a name—Joe—and that changed everything. They didn't have Joe slaughtered, I think they eventually had to have him put to sleep in his old age. Naming something gives a connection.

In Jesus' time we see that naming something gave power over it. Naming a situation can give power in that situation. And even sometimes naming a situation can give power over that situation.

It's important that we name it.

One thing I think it's important to name accurately is the guilt that lots of us have talked about because we didn't lose a family member, or we didn't lose our home. This is a common feeling but we need to name it accurately. Guilt is a feeling that God gives when we've done something wrong. It short-lived, helps us to see things accurately, helps us do a course correction, and then it's gone. Guilt is a healthy godly emotion, but it really doesn't have a place here. If you say you're feeling guilty because you didn't lose anyone or anything, you need to name that more accurately. You didn't do anything wrong. What you are feeling is not guilt that comes from God, it's remorse because others have lost so much.

Why is this important. Because baseless guilt can shut you down, it can keep you from taking action, it can make you hide. When what we really need to do is engage, serve, make contact. Name it accurately. We feel remorse for those that have lost people and homes, not guilt. Remorse frees us to serve others. Baseless guilt and hold us back from serving.

I think under these circumstances it's important to name your needs. One of the temptations in a catastrophe like this is to constantly think, "Well, there are people so much worse off than me, I don't want to ask for help." Whether that's with material things, or help in your yard, or help picking through your belongings, or help moving into a new place. But listen, two of the most powerful words you can utter are the words, "I need..." When we need help, sometimes we think, "Well I'll just be strong and take care of this myself. I don't need to talk to anybody about that (my deep sadness, or depression, or doubt). I don't want to ask for financial help..." Name it. "I need..." James 4:2 says, "You have not, because you ask not..." Jesus said in Matthew, **"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened" (Matthew 7:7-8)**. We have this encouragement to ask from God, and to ask from the community of faith.

And it's easy to forget that when we don't ask for help from someone, we rob them of the chance to be in ministry. By saying, "Well, I'll just handle this myself..." We're taking away somebody's opportunity to serve. We're taking away their opportunity to shine light. The 82 families who have lost their homes, please don't hesitate to ask us and others for help. Please don't get to a place where you have not, because you ask not.

Now some people will take advantage of others and use them. And we need to be aware of that and shut that down. But most of us go the other way. We fail to ask for help when we need it. But name your needs. Our offices at church are up and running except for the internet, so let us connect your needs to people who are willing to provide.

This is a good place to probably name something else. The difference between a victim and survivor. Both face the same event, the same trauma, the same pain, it's just what they do with it that makes the difference. A victim mindset will mean that you carry the tornado with you in such a way that you use it as a tool to get something you want later on. You use the event to manipulate situations for pity, or money, or attention. Survivors celebrate. They still feel the same sadness and grief, but they look forward into the future. They base their base their reactions on God's promises like Jeremiah 29:11 where God says, **"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11)**. They base their actions on powerful passages like this from Romans 8, **"In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:37-39)**.

A victim-mindset makes you enslaved to the past, the trauma. A survivor-mindset sets you free to begin again, to live, to love, to experience a new beginning. I love this passage from 2 Corinthians, **"We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed OR We've been surrounded and battered by troubles, but we're not demoralized; we're not sure what to do, but we know that God knows what to do; we've been spiritually terrorized, but God**

hasn't left our side; we've been thrown down, but we haven't broken.” (2 Corinthians 4:8-9).

I say all that, but there have been a few times when I've slipped into the victim mentality the last two weeks. I find that I do it when I get worn out and tired. I want some pity. That's my warning sign that I need to rest, that I need to breath, that I need to stop, even if it's just for a little while and simply be in the presence of God, and be with my wife and kids. Because of our faith, we are not victims, we are survivors, we are conquerors.

One other thing to name, our blessings. We've been through a tragedy, no doubt, we've lost wonderful, faithful, people. But there are so many blessings that have come out of the tornado. I have been so moved by people's generosity. Their willingness to come from so many states and help people dig out. One man talked about how he has reconnected with two of his grown children that he hadn't heard from in years. Things like this bring the blessing of showing us what really matters. There's the blessing of bringing neighbors together. There is the blessing of faith. The Vasquez family was coming home from graduation when the tornado hit. The just made it to their house they were all trying to get inside because they have a basement. That's when it hit. Lori and the 3 kids got out of the truck and went to their front porch. The wind slammed Frank into the truck. He couldn't get out. The family on the porch couldn't get in the front door because of the force of the wind and as they stood there their whole house was destroyed, right in front of them, but they were almost untouched. They spray painted in huge letters on the side of their house, "God saved us!"

What a blessing that the tornado didn't hit during school, or on Sunday morning when Churches would have been full. What a blessing that thousands weren't killed. After hearing miracle, after miracle, after miracle, my faith has grown. Chaos and tragedy can bring so many blessings. Joe and Janece Crosthwait's home was destroyed so they moved in with his sister. Joe was saying that one of the biggest blessings was that his sister's bathroom scale weighed 9lbs light! He offered to buy it from her! Name the blessings. Even in the case of Will Norton's death, his family can see the blessing that his life will be to others because so many will know about Will's faith. Paul wrote, **“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28)**. Not all things are good, but from all things, God can make good things happen. Name the blessings.

We don't like to do this next part, but listen, we need to name our sins too. In a morally relativistic culture, nobody likes to talk about sin. But as our city cleans up, maybe it's a reminder for all of us to do some spiritual house cleaning. As we clear our yards and homes, maybe we need to clear our souls. Maybe we need to name that **lust** that's been getting rooted deeper and deeper into us. Maybe we need to name that **laziness** that's started to take hold. Maybe we need to name the **materialism** that we'd gotten sucked into. Maybe we need to name the **apathy** that we had surrounded ourselves with. Maybe that **self-centeredness**. Maybe that **quick temper**. Maybe that **condescending attitude**. Maybe that **judgmental mindset**.

Paul wrote, **“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2)**. Our city is going to be going through a transformation and renewal. What if we all committed to do the same in our souls? Life is so much lighter, freer, when we confess our sins, name them, and we are set free. John wrote, **“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (I John 1:9)**. Name it.

I think today would also be a good day to name those, from our church, who lost their lives. Glenn and Lorrie Holland were WNL attenders, they died in their home. Nancy Douthitt was 94 and a long time member here at Saint Paul's. Nancy died at the Greenbrier Nursing Home. Judy Smith was also a longtime member at Saint Paul's and she, too, died at the Greenbrier. Will Norton's parents, Mark and Trish, are members here. And Wendy Istas was a part of Saint Paul's for 25 years or more. She served in about every possible capacity. She was a part of the Camino Community. She simply had the biggest heart you could ever imagine.

Wendy will be missed by her husband Jason, her kids and her grandkids. She will be missed by her friends and church family. But her legacy of love, of kindness, of good food, and a tender heart will live on. Her funeral service will be tomorrow at 3pm at Forest Park Baptist church. We name those we've lost.

And finally, we name THE name. The name of Jesus. We're told in scripture, **"Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:9-11).**

The God of the universe who came to walk among us. Jesus' name is powerful. We've got to be careful to not use his name carelessly. But these last two weeks sometimes the only prayer I could pray was one word, "Jesus. Jesus." To bring his name quietly under our breath into every situation, "Jesus." To bring his name into our new hopes and dreams, "Jesus." To bring his name into our fears about the future, "Jesus." To bring his name to bear on our broken hearts and weary bones, "Jesus."

Naming is powerful stuff. May God grant you and me the eyes to see, the wisdom to know, the courage, the strength to name it. And for today, that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.