

Ordinary time 26C - 2019

**There is power in a name** The Rev. Andrew Chappell

Now, in most societies, the following has historically been true—It's not what you know, it's who you know. And typically, the WHO you know has been the wealthy, the powerful, the intelligent, the well-to-do. But Jesus turns this notion upside down, illustrating that if you are to know anyone, it should be the poor!

How does Jesus do this? He tells a story that demonstrates the unimportance of the current cultural status symbols dictating who is great and who is not, who is blessed and who is cursed. Riches no longer matter (in fact, they may actually hurt you in the long run).

Jesus also gives us a practical step concerning how to begin our status-less journey. He does so very simply in that only one of the two main characters—the rich man and the poor man—is actually named. We know the poor man's name: Lazarus.

Why is that important?

The leveling of status begins with knowing the name. Think about it. When you know someone's name, you begin a relationship. There is an attachment that happens. There is a responsibility that occurs (that's why pet adoption agencies give you the name of the puppy you're holding—once you know the name, there is a responsibility attached and you may be taking that dog home.)

**The Trouble with Generalization**

Whenever we generalize people -- the poor, the rich, the elderly, teenagers, the clergy, the laity, etc., we dehumanize them. I was visiting a large church when I heard one of the members state that he didn't like women pastors. This surprised me. I asked him, "What about Sally?" Sally was one of the three clergy at the church. "Oh, Sally...she's different!" was the reply. This female clergy had a name -- and with that, a relationship with this member. That, I think, was the difference.

We may be tempted to generalize the rich -- since so few of us belong to that category. The rich man is not named, but he is also not condemned for being rich, but for his indifference and uncaring attitude towards poor Lazarus right outside his door. Remember that Abraham was wealthy, and he isn't in the place of torment. (by Brian Stoffregen from *Exegetical Notes*)

At *Yad Vashem*—the Israeli Holocaust Museum and Memorial, there is a separate memorial to the children who were killed in the holocaust. The memorial is simple. The room is filled with darkness and lights that look like stars on a clear night. And every few seconds, a voice comes through hidden speakers for a few seconds and then disappears, and then reappears and disappears again. Over and over, every few seconds. All the voice says are the names of the children killed in the holocaust. One at a time. Again and again.

There is power in a name.

When you know the name, the 6 million+ killed in the holocaust becomes tangible.

When you know the name, you have a responsibility.

When you know the name, there is no status, just humanity.

And in Luke, Jesus tells a story, and beckons us, "**Know the name.**"

Know the name of the person next to you.

Know the name of the person you pass on the street.

Know the name of the person who asks you for food, or money.

Know the name of the person who waits on your table.

Know the names of those that serve you.

Know the names of these children that left here today, to go make a mess.

Know the names of their families.

You want to be an ideal church? You want to undo status, level the playing field, fill in the valleys and bring low the mountains?

Begin by knowing the name.