

Epiphany 2C – The Rt. Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori  
St. Paul’s, Alexandria, VA  
20 January 2019, 11 a.m.

Names are important. Almost every diocese has several churches named after St. Paul<sup>1</sup>, usually for Paul the Apostle, Paul of Tarsus, formerly known as Saul. There are others, like Paul the desert hermit<sup>2</sup>, but they are rare. Who knows why and when that name was chosen for this congregation?

In the second creation story God asks the earth creature, Adham, to name all the other creatures – the beasts of the field and the ones that crawl or fly.<sup>3</sup> Naming implies relationship, and sometimes it brings an expectation of control. That’s partly why Anglos have traditionally given children their father’s last name. Hispanic cultures give children the names of both parents. Some cultures give only one name; some put the family name first. What are different cultures saying when they name human beings? Why you were given the name you bear?

I had to find my baptismal certificate when I started the ordination process, and I discovered that I was named for Katharine of Vadstena. Her widowed mother, St. Birgita or Bridget, founded an order of nuns and monks in Sweden that became known as the Bridgettines. In the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century, mother and daughter went to Rome on a diplomatic mission, urging the rival popes to stop fighting with each other. In some ways knowing that has shaped my vocation. How has your name shaped your ministry?

Isaiah is telling his desperate community that they’re going to receive a new name and way of life – no longer a forsaken people living in a desolate land. God will call this people My Delight is in Her, and their land will be Married. God is taking this fractious, wandering people to his bosom forever. No divorce, no abandonment, no trading up. We heard some of the consequences last Sunday, as Jesus was baptized. What new name did this child of Israel hear? ‘You are my beloved, in whom I am well pleased.’

God says the same at our baptisms; God said the same when we first drew breath and, as the psalmist and the prophet Jeremiah say, ‘God knew me and created me while I was still in the womb.’<sup>4</sup> The abiding and eternal reality is that God has called his people, his human creation, Delight, and has taken all of us into his heart – forever. We live and breathe through the activity of the Holy Spirit, and we rise from the death of desolation and abandonment through the activity of Jesus. We cannot be lost from that relationship – we can wander, and believe ourselves lost, but God does not lose or abandon us. Just as Jesus is said to have harrowed hell to retrieve Adam and Eve between the cross and Easter, God will never let us go.

Jesus is confronted with that reality at the wedding in Cana. More than one person is going to be desolate if they’ve run out of wine when the party’s just beginning. Mary notices and prods the servers to do what he asks. Jesus seems not to have fully entered into the festival (like the guest who’s excluded because he’s forgotten his fancy-dress clothes<sup>5</sup>), and he resists: ‘don’t bother me; this isn’t my job.’ Yet almost in the same moment he speaks those words, he tells the servers to fill the big water jars. We know the story: the water for washing (as in

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<sup>1</sup> St. Paul is 4<sup>th</sup> most common name for an Episcopal church  
<https://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~lcrew/rci/joyanyway/joy252.html>

<sup>2</sup> Paul of Thebes, ~228-341 CE

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 2:19-20

<sup>4</sup> Ps 139:13; Jer 1:5

<sup>5</sup> Luke 14:7-14, just before this morning’s gospel

baptism) is transformed into celebratory wine. It's filled with spirit, for the joy of this life. It's not mere water for washing, nor is it new wine, but well-aged wine meant for holy feasting. Isaiah's sign of the kingdom of God is a banquet of rich foods and well-aged wine, strained clear.<sup>6</sup> At some level it says that the washing of repentance has given over to wedded bliss and the joy of faithful union with the One who forever calls us Beloved.

How then will the Beloved live? What happens when we join that wedding feast and toast the health and eternal Delight of that relationship?

Mary has already taken into her heart that vision of wedded bliss. She sees missed opportunity and failed hospitality if there is no wine for the feast. She simply observes and speaks, 'they have no wine.' Her son resists at first, 'it's not time yet,' but then he acts. Mary makes a simple observation, calling attention to the chasm between God's dream and what is. She has spoken the raw truth, like a prophet, and until it's spoken the living Word of God, the fleshy active Word, makes no response. The word of truth begins the feast.

Will we speak, or will we be silent? Knowing ourselves Beloved brings strength and courage to speak truth, and to answer truth-telling with action. People across the world are fleeing war, violence against their loved ones, hunger, unemployment. There's plenty of that reality right here in river city, too.

What does the wedding feast look like here?

I watched a movie on the plane yesterday called *Remember the Titans*. It's the story of a football team here in Alexandria in the midst of integration. In 1971 the school board fired the successful and long-serving white coach and put a black coach from North Carolina in his place. It's a remarkable story about coaches and players who discovered they could love each other. Those beloved brothers were indeed titans who changed the culture of this city – and won the state championship in the process.

We read these lessons in Epiphany as witness to the reality that God's dream is meant for the whole world; the Light of the World shines on all nations; God calls all people and all races Beloved. What might the feast look like all around here?

You will have your own list, but I imagine the furloughed government workers and the contractors who can't work or be paid right now don't feel terribly beloved. Each time I've gone to the airport in recent weeks, I've thanked the TSA employees for being there, and said I know they're struggling. Opportunities for feasting are all around us. I was going into Starbucks early one morning last week in the pouring rain, and before I got to the door, a fellow came up and asked for food and drink for himself and his buddy – 'I don't want money, just something hot,' he said. Certainly (let there be light right here, right now!) – "come to the feast – order what you like."

We are all beloved, and we know that more deeply when we affirm that we're all married to the same creator. The federal employees and contractors are in need of knowing they're beloved. Our legislators and judges and administrators and public servants need to know the same thing. The nastiness in our nation right now has a lot to do with a scarcity mentality – 'if you're getting some benefit, then I and mine won't – we're going to suffer, so we're going to fight for what we think we need.' That is not a godly or religious message; it's a message born of the darkness of fear. The living word of love will cast out that fear – and it's the only thing that can. The beloved people of St. Paul's can "shine as a light in the world to the glory of God" in the midst of the wedding feast.

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<sup>6</sup> Isaiah 25:6

What might happen if we all sent love letters to President Trump and Speaker Pelosi? Or a vintage bottle of the best to someone we think wishes us harm?

The invitations to the feast are all around us – when the next person cuts you off in traffic, how about offering a smile and a five-fingered blessing? The kingdom of God, the wedding banquet, is around us and among us and within us. Knowing ourselves Beloved is key to seeing the other as Beloved. We're not just Married; we're stuck with each other – let's figure out how to make a feast.