

Psalm 40

- ¹ I waited patiently for the LORD;
he inclined to me and heard my cry.
- ² He drew me up from the desolate pit,*
out of the miry bog,
and set my feet upon a rock,
making my steps secure.
- ³ He put a new song in my mouth,
a song of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear,
and put their trust in the LORD.
- ⁴ Happy are those who make
the LORD their trust,
who do not turn to the proud,
to those who go astray after false gods.
- ⁵ You have multiplied, O LORD my God,
your wondrous deeds and your thoughts towards us;
none can compare with you.
Were I to proclaim and tell of them,
they would be more than can be counted.
- ⁶ Sacrifice and offering you do not desire,
but you have given me an open ear.*
Burnt-offering and sin-offering
you have not required.
- ⁷ Then I said, 'Here I am;
in the scroll of the book it is written of me.*
- ⁸ I delight to do your will, O my God;
your law is within my heart.'
- ⁹ I have told the glad news of deliverance
in the great congregation;
see, I have not restrained my lips,
as you know, O LORD.
- ¹⁰ I have not hidden your saving help within my heart,
I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation;
I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness
from the great congregation.

¹¹ Do not, O LORD, withhold
your mercy from me;
let your steadfast love and your faithfulness
keep me safe for ever.

¹² For evils have encompassed me
without number;
my iniquities have overtaken me,
until I cannot see;
they are more than the hairs of my head,
and my heart fails me.

¹³ Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me;
O LORD, make haste to help me.

¹⁴ Let all those be put to shame and confusion
who seek to snatch away my life;
let those be turned back and brought to dishonour
who desire my hurt.

¹⁵ Let those be appalled because of their shame
who say to me, 'Aha, Aha!'

¹⁶ But may all who seek you
rejoice and be glad in you;
may those who love your salvation
say continually, 'Great is the LORD!'

¹⁷ As for me, I am poor and needy,
but the Lord takes thought for me.
You are my help and my deliverer;
do not delay, O my God.

John 1:29-42

²⁹The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" ³⁰This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' ³¹I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel." ³²And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. ³³I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."

³⁵The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" ³⁷The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" ³⁹He said to

them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. ⁴⁰One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). ⁴²He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).

Sermon

Here's a fun fact about me that you might not know: I don't love my last name. I mean, Shriver is fine, so far as names go. It's easy to spell, and most people say it correctly the first time, but honestly? I wish 21-year-old Kelly had kept her maiden name and been done with it. For several reasons. First, I just liked it better. Boubel, while neither easy to spell or pronounce correctly, is an objectively more interesting name than Shriver. And, had I kept it, I would have avoided the problem of having "BS" as my initials. Which, as a public speaker who earns my living by trying to come up with interesting and true things to say from this pulpit, I can tell you, those initials sort of hang over me like humbling warning, lest I become known as the Reverend BS.

Anyway, we've talked before about how important names are, so I won't go into it too much again. Just to remind you that names are important. They say something about us, today, which is why parents and dog owners the world around spend a lot of time thinking of names for their beloved children and pups. And, of course, names meant something in the ancient world, as well. They would give information: who your father was, and sometimes what job you held. Names, then and now, sometimes hint at ethnicity or nationality or the language your family speaks. And the process of changing a name is often an ordeal. Newly married folks have it the easiest, with a trip to the DMV and some social security paperwork. But that's not the only instance of name change. Sometimes in divorce or tragedy, names are changed. Sometimes because you don't love the name your 21-year-old self chose. And still for others, perhaps most significantly, they change their name to something they've chosen for themselves. Trans folks very often do this as part of their coming out process. Churches honor these name changes with an actual service, sort of like baptism, where the new name is blessed and spoken and shared, and the old name, sometimes called a "dead name," is metaphorically buried and put to rest.

As a side note, but an important one, if you're ever blessed to be a part of a name change process for a friend or family member who is transitioning, one of the gifts you can give is to be intentional about that new name. Use their new name, and do not use their dead name. It's hard, and sometimes we mess up, but it's respectful and kind to do our best to use the new name. Equally importantly, don't share a Trans person's dead name, unless they give you permission.

But back to names and our scripture for the day. This week and next I want to talk a little about Simon, also known as Peter, also known as Simon Peter, also known as Cephas, also known as Petros, also known as Sham'un al-Safa. He has more names than Prince. And all these different names are not really an accident, they're kind of emblematic of his whole

story. Whatever we call him, Peter is all over the place throughout scripture, he's a wild character to follow.

This story, of course, is the first, his introduction. We know that Simon son of John, as he was known at the time, was a fisherman by trade, living in Bethsaida. We know from other stories that he had a mother in law, because once Jesus healed her of sickness, so Simon was married. Sort of a fun detail for the man who became the first Pope, if you ask me. And one day, Jesus meets Simon's brother, Andrew. And Andrew gets obsessed, and he runs back to grab Simon, and he's like: you've got to meet this guy. I've found him! Jesus! He's the Messiah, the one we've waited for. And Simon comes along, and the first thing Jesus does is give him a new name.

Like, what a bizarre interaction.

You meet a person, they look you over, and they're like, yeah, I know you're Simon, but I'm going to call you Peter. Ok? Cool.

Now, did it really happen this way? Maybe.

Or, maybe not. See, the gospel of John was written by a writer who never met a secret sign or symbol they didn't love. It's like wall to wall symbolism. So, whenever I'm reading John, I sort of think to myself—could this be a symbol? And with a name change, certainly.

I don't doubt that Simon also went by Cephas and Peter and all the rest, maybe like a nickname or how people sometimes start going by their middle name or whatever. But when it's dropped in so awkwardly, as the first thing Jesus says to him, I think the symbolism is bigger here than the story.

And the symbol says this—this guy, Simon Peter, he's going to be important. He's going to be a rock. And while we're quick to jump ahead in the story and be like, oh yeah, that Peter, he's the rock of the church! The foundation! The first pope! Let's not forget he was a rock in other ways, too. Like that time Peter hopped out of the boat and tried to walk on water to Jesus? Literally sank like a stone. Or that time Jesus told him, to his face, he'd deny him three times, which he denied he'd ever do, and then just a few hours later, dumb as a rock Peter forgot this and went ahead and denied Jesus three times. Or remember when Peter grabbed the sword in the garden, when Jesus was arrested, and sliced the ear off the servant of the priest? And Jesus is like, Peter, I know you're a rock, but don't be so dense. I've been preaching a peaceful message of relative nonviolence for years, what on earth gave you the idea I wanted you to cut someone's ear off!? Peter, a rock in ways both noble and ignoble.

We're going to talk about Peter in more depth next week, his story and all that. For this week, this is something I think is worth hearing in his renaming. When Jesus gives Peter a new name, what does it actually mean? Why would Jesus rename him? And what does a new name say about how Simon-Peter's life will change?

Peter's name change isn't predictive or inevitable. There's nothing about this scene that says there's only one way Simon's life is going to work out. This name change, instead, is more like a door. Jesus is offering Simon a new way of being, but Simon chooses to walk through the door, to become Peter, a follower of Jesus.

And the name alone isn't magic. Peter doesn't all of a sudden become Pope-material right out of the starting gate. As we'll see next week, the arc of Simon-Peter's life is anything but direct and predictable. And Simon becomes Peter, the rock, not because of the name, but because he followed Jesus. He messed up along the way, a lot, but he never stopped trailing along. Listening to Jesus' stories, asking questions, talking to the other followers of Jesus, and doing the things that felt like the next right nudge from the Holy Spirit. It's in the following that Simon becomes Peter, and in time, the foundation of the church.

I think this might be a hopeful reflection for us, as well. We may not have the benefit of Jesus literally giving us a new name and inviting us into his band of merry followers. In some ways, it seems like it would be easier if we did have that, right?

But the hope is that we can actually do exactly what Simon Peter did. We can choose to listen to the teachings of Jesus, to ask questions and explore our doubts, to make mistakes and trust that there will be forgiveness, to gather with other believers and share in a community of faith and story and song and tradition. And in this, we're changed. For me, this is the hope of renaming. That it's not the name that's magic, but instead the process of becoming. Because, want as much as I would like, I'm not going to change my name anytime soon. I'm going to continue to come to terms with Shriver, and pray that I don't become the Reverend BS. Instead, the invitation is to put our hope into a process, a lifelong journey of becoming the people Jesus is inviting us to become.