

his father and cheat his brother out of his inheritance. Jacob really is named after what he will become.

**Some Bible names communicate God's message.** Jesus is given many names in the Bible. His Hebrew name, *Yeshua*, means "to rescue or deliver." As Matthew explains it: "You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). Matthew also describes Jesus as "Immanuel," which means "God with us" (Matthew 1:23) because in Jesus, God came to dwell on earth with humanity.

**Some Bible names indicate a new beginning or new direction in a person's life.** The fisherman Simon is renamed Peter by Jesus. Peter means "rock," and this Peter is to be the rock on which Jesus establishes his church.

What does your name mean? The members of the 2019 Confirmation Class have long and interesting names. I'm going to highlight one of the names from each of our confirmands and share what it teaches us about being disciples of Jesus Christ.

**ANDERS CHRISTIAN.** The first Christian in the Bible is the fisherman Andrew. (Anders is the Scandinavian form of the name Andrew.) In John 1:41 it says: *The first thing Andrew did [after meeting Jesus] was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is the Christ).* When Andrew met Jesus, he was so excited that he couldn't wait to share the good news. Andrew was the first evangelist, the first one to tell someone else about Jesus. Christians are constantly pointing others to Jesus. Christians live out their faith in what they say and by what they do. The lesson is this: when you meet Jesus, be sure to tell others about the remarkable forgiveness he offers and the wonderful new life he promises. Be evangelists for Jesus, pointing others to him by what you say and by how you live your life.

**GRACE LOUISE.** *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith," says Paul, "and this is not from yourselves, it is a gift from God – not by works, so that no one can boast"* (Ephesians 2:8-9). You are a child of God and part of God's family, not because you are better or smarter or worthier than anyone else. You are a child of God and part of God's family because God loves you. God names you and claims you despite your faults and flaws. This is how God's grace works. There is nothing any of us can do to make God love us more, and nothing any of us can do to make God love us less. We are accepted, loved, saved, and sent out to serve because God extends God's grace to us. The lesson is this: accept the grace God offers to you and extend that same grace to others. Live grace-filled lives.

**BENJAMIN ALAN.** Shortly before his death, Moses blessed the twelve tribes of Israel. *About Benjamin, he said: "The beloved of the LORD rests in safety – the High God surrounds him all day long – the beloved rests between his shoulders"* (Deuteronomy 33:12). God shows special concern for God's people. Every hour of the day, God protects us. Every minute of every hour, God surrounds us with God's love. We rest between God's shoulders as a child rests between a mother's shoulders, carried on her back while she works. God is never far from us. The symbol for this tribe is the wolf, a fiercely courageous fighter, as were the warriors of Benjamin. But the wolf is also a pack animal, protective of its family and reliant on one another for help. The lesson is this: live in God's love and protection, be strong and courageous for God, and trust in your faith family to love and support you.

**BENJAMIN DOVE.** The dove, of course, is the symbol of God's Holy Spirit. Paul tells us that, *The Spirit's presence is shown in some way in each person for the good of all* (1 Corinthians 12:7). God's Spirit gives each one of us gifts for ministry, some ability or talent that serves the common good. Elsewhere, Paul compares the church to the human body. The parts of the body each have different jobs, but they all serve for the good of the whole organism. In the same way, the Spirit gives the individual members of the church different gifts and abilities, but all must be used to help the church fulfill its mission of bringing in God's reign of love and justice and peace. The lesson is this: find your Spirit-given gift and use it to the best of your ability so that God's promised future may be achieved.

**SHELBY ANN MIA.** Anna was a prophet. She spent all her time in the Temple worshipping God. Anna's dearest wish was to see God's promised Messiah before she died. One day she saw Mary and Joseph enter the Temple. *Coming up to them at that very moment, [Anna] gave thanks to God and spoke about the child [Jesus] to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem* (Luke 2:37-38). Anna believed in God's promise of a Messiah, a Savior who would rescue God's people. She waited a long time for God to fulfill the promise of a Savior, but her faith in God never faltered. She stayed strong in her belief that the God who promises is faithful. And when she saw Jesus, Anna recognized him as the fulfillment of God's promise. She praised God and told everyone about Jesus. The lesson is this: trust in God's promises and be patient as God works those promises out in your life.

**TAYTON CALVIN.** Tate's name reminded me of John Calvin, one of the founders of the Reformed Tradition of which our church is a member. Calvin created a church system where elders and pastor work together to achieve God's mission in the world. Calvin was not a patient man or an easy man with whom to work. He was incredibly smart, but often frustrated by those around him. Calvin said of himself, "[God] tamed to teachableness a

mind too stubborn for its years.” Calvin learned to rely on God for help and to live out the words of Jesus: *“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls”* (Matthew 11:29). Calvin learned that the contented disciple is the one who submits to the will of God, the yoke of Jesus, and the teaching of the Holy Spirit. The lesson is this: keep your spirit teachable, open to God’s Spirit working in and through you, and you will have an easier time in life.

**ZAYNE DAVID.** When God made David king, God said of David: *“I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do”* (Acts 13:22). Although David made many mistakes in his life, he remained faithful to God – a man after God’s own heart. We will make mistakes, too, and say the wrong thing, and let others down, and disappoint God sometimes. A man or woman after God’s own heart isn’t perfect, that simply isn’t possible. But a man or woman after God’s own heart is one who seeks to live in obedience to God. And when we do make the inevitable mistake, we own up to it and ask God to forgive us, knowing that God is ready and willing to forgive. The lesson is this: be men and women after God’s own heart. Seek to love and serve God and each another. When you mess up, own up; because with God there is always forgiveness and hope.

Combine the best aspects of your names to be the best disciples for Jesus that you can be. Point others to Jesus. Accept God’s grace. Be courageous. Use your gifts. Trust in God’s promises. Open yourself to God’s Spirit. Be men and women after God’s own heart.

You know what God expects of you. You’ve studied what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. You’ve learned how to listen for the Holy Spirit working in your life. You’ve explored what our church is about and what it intends to do in and for this community. For all these reasons, Jesus now calls you his friend. And with that new name comes a new claim: to live and act as Jesus lives and acts, and to say and do as he says and does, and to love and value the people and things he loves and values. May you be blessed by the God who knows your name, by Jesus who loves you, and by the Holy Spirit who guides your steps in the ways of peace. Amen.

Prayer: Naming and Claiming God, You call each one of us to speak and act on Your behalf in our world today. Forgive us when we are hesitant to follow; when we question Your call or make excuses for our abilities; when we complain about our lack of time or hoard our resources. Give us courage to step out in faith, to go where you send us without hesitation or fear, trusting that Your presence goes with us, and that You will provide all that we need. Amen.

## Named and Claimed

Confirmation Sunday, March 3, 2019  
Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Isaiah 43:1-7  
John 15:12-17

“What’s in a name?” asked Juliet in William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*? “A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” That’s probably true. A rose will smell the same no matter what we call it. But, and with all due respect to Mr. Shakespeare, names DO matter. Most of us don’t get to choose our names. Typically, our parents choose names for us. Maybe we’re named after a family member. Perhaps our parents chose a name which represents a characteristic they hope we will possess, like Patience or Hope. It could be our parent just liked the sound of a name. Our names are important, because they become who we are, our names are our identity.

The fact is, each one of you is named and claimed. Long before your parents gave you your specific names, God named you and claimed you. Through the prophet Isaiah, God said: “I have called you by name, you are mine” (Isaiah 43:1-2). That’s important to remember. We do not serve some distant God who does not know us. We serve the Living God who created us and who wants to be an intimate part of our lives. Our God knows your name and lays claim to your life. Which is why Bible names carry such significance.

**Some Bible names record an aspect of a person’s birth.** God formed Adam out of the dust of the ground (Genesis 2:7). The name Adam comes from the Hebrew word *adamah*, which means “ground.” Adam’s name is rooted in how humankind began.

**Some Bible names establish a relationship with God.** God made a radical promise to Abram that he would be the “father of many nations” (Genesis 17:4-5). His new name, Abraham, embeds God’s mighty promise to into Abraham’s very identity.

**Some Bible names express the parent’s reaction to the birth of their child.** Sarah and Abraham’s first-born child is named Isaac, because Sarah says, “God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.” (Genesis 21:6). Sarah, thought to be childless, rejoices when God gives her a son.

**Some Bible names reflect a person’s character.** Jacob’s name means ‘he grasps the heel,’ which fits because Jacob clutched the heel of his twin brother Esau at birth. But Jacob’s name is also a Hebrew idiom meaning ‘he deceives.’ Jacob would one day deceive