

This past Friday we had graduation for our church preschool.

After the children had processed in with their caps and sung several songs, it was time for them to come forward and receive their certificates.

As Deanna Klimek, our preschool director, called out each child's name, she also told the audience what that child wanted to be when he or she grew up. It is always interesting to hear what is on their minds at this age and to what they aspire to be.

This year we had a few firemen and policemen, a vet, a couple of teachers, and a paleontologist to round things off. But we also had a few girls who wanted to be princesses, Elise the mermaid, Josh the dinosaur digger, one boy who wanted to be a newspaper delivery person and Christopher, a referee for flag football games. Already at the age of 4 or 5, these children were trying to decide how they would be known.

Rachel, the future mom, and Katherine, the future teacher, and the other kids already knew the importance of a name.

Their name gives them purpose and meaning in this world.

Today we will call out the names of fourteen 8th graders as they prepare to affirm their faith. Brad the listener, Brooklyn the bass clarinetist, Raymond the Tae Kwan Do black belt, Nathan the video game king and Maggie the courageous will join their classmates at the altar rail to renew the covenant God made with them when they were infants.

They were washed in the name of the Father, the Son, & the Holy Spirit.

They were given a new name, child of God, which will be with them all through their lives. They were marked with the cross of Christ on their foreheads to always remind them to whom they belong.

You are God's child. You belong to Jesus the Christ.

Jesus' decision to give you and me his name was no small matter.

It would cost him dearly. In order to give us his name he would have to endure the cross and face his own death. He would have to carry the sins of us all. He would have to confront all the evil that defies God and come out the victor. On the third day after his crucifixion, Jesus proved to the world that his life was stronger than death.

He took away everything that could stand in between us and him.

Jesus gave us his name so that we would belong to him forever.

There is a teacher here in Wake County who I will call Mrs. G. Mrs. G teaches

elementary students who have trouble reading. They go to her class and receive extra one on one help from her. Now there are some things you need to know about the students who come to see Mrs. G.

Life isn't always too great for them. She had one little girl show up in her class unable to concentrate on her work. Mrs. G eventually found out why. She was hungry. There was very little for her to eat at home.

Mrs. G has 1st and 2nd graders show up in her class at the beginning of the year who are tougher than kids twice/3 times their age. In a world and home life where there is abuse, where love is never guaranteed, where parents are stressed out just trying to pay bills and put food on the table, you learn to be tough from a young age if you are going to survive.

There's also something you need to know about Mrs. G. Each child who steps into her classroom is no longer just a student at the school. Once they step foot inside her door, they belong to her. They are given a new name. They are now known as Mrs. G's students.

Now there are rules. They have to behave. They have to give it their very best when it comes to their work. And in exchange for that, Mrs. G will be the biggest cheerleader, the biggest fan they have ever had. She will go to bat for them. She will do everything within her power to help them improve their reading skill because they belong to her. They are Mrs. G's kids. She has developed a relationship with them. If Mrs. G gets word that one of her kids has been causing trouble somewhere else in the school, she will seek them out and ask him or her why one of her kids would act that way. Tough love does not let them slide and get away with it. You carry Mrs. G's name and with it comes responsibility.

Sure, Mrs. G is there to teach them how to read, but as she sees it, that is only half her mission. She is there so that each child in her classroom knows that there is at least one person in this world who truly cares for them. She wants them to be able to trust beyond a shadow of a doubt that Mrs. G is for them.

In our gospel lesson today we hear how Jesus has given us his name. We now through our baptism belong to him. As God's children, our lives

aren't picture perfect. Some of us have been broken. Others of us, like Mrs. G's kids, have been toughened by hardships we have faced. But now we have Jesus as our good teacher in the school of life. We have been given a new name. We are Jesus' students, his disciples. We are God's children. And in Jesus, we have someone whose love for us will never fail. Jesus is our biggest cheerleader, our biggest fan, the one who loves us most of all. Jesus, the king of the universe, is **for** you and for me.

As people who bear the name of Jesus, we know we are blessed. Jesus protects us and gives us all that we have. When we follow Jesus and his teachings, we are like trees planted by the river's edge that will never go thirsty even in a time of drought. We can grow and prosper and become the people God has made us to be for we never have to doubt that Jesus loves us & will always be for us.

This is how some of our confirmands in their essays spoke about bearing the name of Jesus and living in relationship with him. Bryant Beebe urges us to remember our baptism every time we put water on our heads to remember how our sins have been washed away. Julie Franck and Mackenzie Robinson remind us that even in the small gestures we do for others that we bear the name of Jesus and help others see his love. Jacob Montgomery encourages us to actively share our faith and to love even our enemies. Laura Kutner and Megan Hutzenbuhler reassure us that our Lord is always present with us and that we are called to a life of prayer and conversation with him.

Daniel Willey warns us that a life in Christ is not simple. If we want to center our lives on Christ we can't let material goods or anything else come in the way of our faith. And David Vitek likens our lives to a mystery novel that God has written. There are many unknowns as the story progresses, but we have to trust God to guide us & lead us to our ultimate destiny in life.

Jesus has given us his name. He has placed his name on our 14 confirmands in Holy Baptism. We have a Lord and Savior who is for us. This is good news, comforting news for us, and with it comes our responsibility to live in such a way that others **can** recognize that we are Jesus' students/his disciples.

As Jesus sends us out this day, may we boldly go bearing his name
and sharing his goodness and love to this troubled world.