



MOSAIC®

A life of possibilities for people
with intellectual disabilities.



Sermon by the Rev. Brian Krause

Main Text: Ephesians 2:14-20

Supporting Texts: Galatians 3:13; 1 Peter 2:9-10

What names have you been called in your life? All of us get called many names as we go through our life. Some of the names we are called are comforting and make us feel good. When we are called names like sweetheart or friend, or called smart, winner, brave and the like, we feel good about ourselves. We also know that there are other names we are sometimes called. There are names that pierce the heart and cause much pain. When we are called things like enemy, loser, coward, dumb and the like, then we are grieved and bear much pain. People who are disabled are also called names. Some of these names are different from what others are called, yet a lot of the names people use for those who have disabilities are still very painful and cause a lot of grief.

One of the biggest names people with disabilities are called is “wrong.” This often comes in the form of the question, “What’s wrong with you?” Although the person who is asking the question may be genuinely curious about the nature of the person’s disability, in the question itself they have already labeled the person’s disability as wrong. We all have a desire to fit in and be welcomed by others. The last thing any of us want to be is “wrong.” Yet when people with disabilities are asked this question over and over again throughout the course of their lives, they can’t help but feel like they themselves are wrong. Even worse, this name causes some with disabilities to feel like outcasts from society. The message behind the name is that whatever disability you have, it is wrong and unacceptable in this society.

One of the names used for people with disabilities is actually a medical term that has turned into a slight. That name is “retarded.” Although a rare few professionals may continue to use the term mentally retarded, this name has taken on a life of its own in the broader culture. Now this term is used on playgrounds and in school yards as an insult to kids who are a different, slow, or awkward. Today you may hear kids say something like, “Are you retarded or something?” Even teens and adults misuse this word. When someone says or does something that is considered to be foolish or dumb the phrase is sometimes heard, “That’s so retarded!” When we use this name as an insult we are devaluing the lives of millions of people who live with some form of developmental disability. When we use this word as a joke to make fun of someone we are saying that people with developmental disabilities are a joke.

There is another name that people with disabilities often have to bear. This name is often unspoken, but its impact is very much felt in the everyday lives of people with disabilities. That name is “demon” or “devil.” You won’t hear anybody call a disabled person a demon, but you can see how this terrible label is carried out when people go out of their way to avoid a person with a disability. A community will not call people with disabilities devils, but they will make it very clear that they think disabled people are devils when they fight against the opening of a group home in their area. People are afraid of things they do not understand and, unfortunately, instead of trying to understand, many people simply assign labels and avoid that which makes them feel uncomfortable. This label is also used among church-going people when they say that disabilities are caused by sin or demon possession. Unfortunately the church has caused some people with disabilities to feel as if they were worse sinners than everybody else. When some people with disabilities are told that their sins have caused their condition, then it can lead them to feel unloved by God.

There is another name many people with disabilities are called that may seem positive, but is indeed very negative. This is another one of those names that is not exactly spoken per se. This name is “angel.” This name occurs when people with disabilities are placed on a pedestal as a special class of human being. Someone may say to a disabled person, “I feel like God sent you here to teach me a lesson about love.” Someone else may say, “I think God is going to do big things, or special things, with you.” This name may feel comforting to some, but there is a very real danger to giving people with disabilities a super-human status. In the Bible, whenever someone is greeted by an angel, the first response is always fear. People are afraid of angels and if they ever actually saw one in all of their glory they would likely cower in fear. Human beings just don’t like hanging out with super-holy beings. When people with disabilities are seen as super holy beings, then people don’t want to hang out with them either. Bearing this name often leads a person with a disability to a lot of loneliness as they are viewed as too holy or too special to be around.

All of these names cause pain, but they do even more than that; these names create barriers between people. When we view people with disabilities in this way then we are closing off the possibility of community with them and we lose the wonderful gifts that they bring to the table. When we view people with disabilities on the basis of these names, then we are cutting off a crucial part of the body of Christ.

The good news is that Jesus Christ died on the cross that we might all be free, not only from sin and death, but also from the negative labels and stigma that we all bear. Through his death on the cross Christ became a curse for us so that all people who bear the curse of sin, death, and negative labels might be set free to live a new life. Those negative labels we once bore now belong to Christ, and in their place we get something new. We get a new life no longer defined by the negative labels of the world, but grounded in our baptism we receive a new identity in Christ. As part of this new identity we get some new names from Christ. What are those names? In the first letter of Peter we hear some of them, “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people.” In Christ, people with disabilities are no longer considered to be wrong and thereby cast off, but now they are chosen. In Christ, people with disabilities are not “demons,” but they are “royal priests.” In Christ, people with disabilities are not mocked for their conditions, but they join us as part of a holy nation. In Christ, people with disabilities are not part of some class of super-humans too holy to be around, but they join us as God’s own people. These names are not just for people with disabilities, but these names are for you too. You also are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and God’s own people. These names from God are not reserved for one group of people, but in Christ they describe all God’s people. In Christ, the able-bodied and people with disabilities are not different classes or groups of people, but in Christ we are all one. That means that we are all made part of the one body of Christ and we all share in the one mission of God! That means we all have a purpose and a role to play in the body of Christ. God has given each of us special gifts and talents for the work of the Church and the proclamation of the gospel. Those whom we once saw as different are our brothers and sister in Christ and fellow priests with us in the kingdom of God.

God in Christ is working to break down the barriers that separate people from each other. God in Christ is working to bring together different people into one body. Christ is working to break down the negative stigmas that create barriers between people. Christ is making one out of the many. In God’s eyes, every single person has dignity, worth, and a purpose. We all have gifts and talents that we bring to the body of Christ and to the mission of the church. We can no longer look over whole groups of people, for Christ calls us together to be his body. Those who we once thought were different are no longer called strangers and aliens, for in Christ we have been brought together in one kingdom. In Christ we are all citizens with the saints.