

Proper 16, Year A

Sunday, August 23, 2026

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be always acceptable unto You, o Lord our Strength and our Redeemer.

“Who do they say that I am?”

“Who do *you* say that I am?”

What’s in a name, anyway? A certain Shakespeare heroine, who coincidentally shares a name with my own sister, famously asked this question as she pondered the ramifications of having fallen in love with the son of her father’s greatest enemy. The solution she imagines presenting to her beloved? “doff thy name, / And for that name which is no part of thee / Take all myself.”

I can relate to this feeling that the name imposed by one’s family can at times feel like a heavy burden. But I have to disagree with the idea that a name is no part of oneself. And alas, things didn’t work out all that well for Juliet Capulet of Verona.

Names mean so many things in our world. Expecting parents spend hours poring over baby name books for just the right meaning, or mining family trees for a legacy to honor. My own parents, before starting their family, decided that the first daughter or second son would get a name from my mom’s side of the family, and the first son or second daughter from my dad’s. My older sister’s first name came from our great aunt—our maternal grandfather’s sister—and her middle name from our grandmother’s middle name before marriage. I was given our *paternal* grandmother’s first and maiden names as my first and middle, respectively, meaning that my entire name matched her entire married name.

Sharing a name can create both belonging and confusion. I *loved* growing up as my grandmother’s namesake, even at one point asking members of my extended family to call me “little Nan”—as “Nan” was our grandmother-name for her. In school, I also shared my name, always with one classmate from kindergarten through eighth grade, and eventually with as many as seven other students *in my grade alone* for most of high school. While our “name club’s” senior talent show act was fun and funny, I yearned for originality.

Furthermore, the phonemes of the name itself fell flat in my ear. I felt that it lacked melody. It just never quite fit.

I endeavored to rename myself several times, from trying to coin nicknames that never really stuck to attempting a new pronunciation of my given name at camp, the summer before high school. The chosen name by which most people now know me, Criksett, grew out of one of

these early failed coinages; it only caught on in college after, (1), I got to choose it as my email username [P.S., the original spelling was taken, which is when the two-k's-and-two-t's spelling was born], and (2), a close friend had an ex-girlfriend who shared my birth name and decided he would much rather call me something else, and my email name was what came next to his mind. I got used to answering to "Crikkett," so in later years, in places where the shared-name-confusion thing came up again, I offered Crikkett as an alternative, until eventually it came to feel more like my name than the one I was given at birth.

We are all given many names throughout our lives. Children are given family nicknames by siblings and cousins. Parents and grandparents are named by their progeny; for example, when a close friend's son was born, she and her wife discussed what they might have him call them to differentiate between his two mothers, but once he was old enough to say the words, *he* was the one to name them Mom and Mom Mom. Our peers also name us: my sister's college friends called her Hoolie as a play on Julieta; in grad school, in a spirit of whimsy, I insisted on calling a close friend Kenny Boo-Boo; and it seems like many musicians refer to each other by first name + instrument, such as my good friends Christina Violin, Julia Viola, and Keyla Alto Sax.

Many of us also change our names as we grow into ourselves. The change might be subtle, such as Bobby deciding to go by Rob, or Lizzy becoming Beth. People who marry might take their spouse's last name or adopt a new family name together. Artists and authors take on professional names by which the public knows them. Popes and monarchs change their names when they rise to their new station.

And for some of us, a given name that doesn't quite fit might feel like just one of many symptoms that something bigger about ourselves, something we were given or expected to take on from as early as birth, doesn't fit either. For me, I chose to shed my birth name legally as one of many ways that I affirm myself as an agender person, that is to say, a person whose identity fits best when untethered from any specific gender identity. Much like my birth name, the gender I was assigned at birth has given me opportunities for belonging at times, but ultimately just isn't quite right for me. Although glimpses of this truth have shown through various experiences I can now find in retrospect, it was only about seven years ago that I felt that click, that divine inspiration, that called me to walk this path. This revelation came to me as clearly and as simply—and with just as rocky a path to be found behind it, once I looked back—as the moment nearly twenty years ago when God called me back to the Church. I grappled with questions, tried to peer through the fog, and one day saw the path before me clear.

The Bible is full of stories of transformations and the new names that accompany them. Abram and Sarai become Abraham and Sarah. Saul gives up his persecution of early Christians and becomes a follower of Jesus by the name of Paul. And in today's Gospel, Simon Peter gives the best answer to Jesus's query, "But who do *you* say that I am?" and becomes Peter, the "rock [on

which] I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.” And, as an interesting juxtaposition, Jesus follows this pronouncement with a stern order that the disciples *hide* Jesus’s own true identity, and not to tell anyone that he is the Messiah. At least for now.

So, what’s in a name? For Peter, his new name symbolizes divine favor: Jesus goes on to say to him, “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” And with this blessing comes a great expectation, that Peter’s faith must be and remain as steadfast and strong as a foundation stone. Human as he is, we know he will falter, but I believe this name and this expectation also ultimately give him strength.

I waited to change my name legally until two things happened: First, I simply couldn’t bear to see official mailings greet me by my birth name any longer. Second, I finally figured out exactly what name I was ready to take on. I knew I wanted Crikkett to be part of it, but I also craved some connection to my original name and especially my original initials. But Crikkett doesn’t start with an S, and I couldn’t think how to invent an S-name for which Crikkett could be a viable shortening. “Scrikkett”? Hmm, nah. And finally one day, it occurred to me that I could put another entire name in front of Crikkett. But what to choose? My mind wandered to fantasy stories I enjoyed in my youth, and I landed on Bastian from *The Neverending Story*, which I at least assume is short for Sebastian. And hey! There they were, my given first and middle initials, S and B, together in one name. And as a bonus, the oboist part of me enjoys sharing a name with Bach.

So my first name is two names: Sebastian Crikkett. I replaced my middle name by going back one more generation to my grandmother’s mother, whose maiden name was Rambo. (Yes, really. Yes, spelled like that.) And my family surname remains because, although I always hated being last in the alphabetical line as a kid, that’s the one part of my name that has always pretty much always felt like where I belong.

As I’ve introduced my new name to my community, I’ve had a few people ask what they should call me. I usually say Crikkett, because that’s what I’m most used to; it’s also fun when someone calls me Sebastian, or Bas for short. And as a quick note, during the rite you’ll hear Mother Susan use the neopronouns xe, xem, and xyr to refer to me, by my request. I know these are likely to be unfamiliar to many of you, but like my new name, they are the ones that feel most comfortable for me.

I am deeply grateful to Mother Susan for finding today’s Rite of Renaming to help me celebrate this new beginning, and to the delegates at General Convention who in 2018 adopted *The Book of Occasional Services* from which today’s service is taken. Thank you to all of you Trinity

parishioners who celebrate with me during today's Sunday service, and to my friends from outside the Trinity community who have joined us this morning.

I'd like to end with a longish and slightly paraphrased quotation from Leslie Jones, when she appeared recently as a guest on comedian W. Kamau Bell's podcast, "Who's With Me?" She started by speaking of the importance of allowing art to be adapted to new forms, and ended up musing on Creation in a way that resonated with me:

He created you, and I say this all the time, you are a specific piece of art that was made by Him. He wants that art to do what it does.

He wants you to find your gallery. He wants you to find a way to show the best. You are so small if you're putting God in this box of thinking that He only wants one thing.

God made a platypus. He made a *platypus*. Do you know how funny a platypus is?

Why would you think He's not making a transgender [person]? Who? Or a gay, or a Black person, or, what makes you think that He's making one thing?

He made oranges, apples, bananas, pineapples. Why would He make one type of human?¹

I'll add, not only does God make many types of humans; God gives each of us the power and invitation to become, over the course of our lives, who we need to be. And, where it feels right, to give that new self a new name.

Amen.

¹ From Who's with Me? with W. Kamau Bell: Leslie Jones on Knowing Your Worth, Jul 22, 2026
<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/whos-with-me-with-w-kamau-bell/id1896571384?i=1000777818180&r=46>