

The Preus Family in the Dominican Republic

Winter 2020 Newsletter

What's in a name?

Names are important. Consider how moms and dads think long and hard searching for the perfect name for their child. Some names we dismiss right away and others we mull over until, eventually, we select just the right one. Perhaps it's just the way it sounds, or maybe it has a special meaning in the family or tradition. In recent years I have been impressed with the Spanish names I've come across. One of my favorites is of a woman named "Maria de la Santa Cruz Rosalina Agnelia Rodriguez Cuellar Rene." What a magnificent name! Names are important, and it is an honor when important people know us by the name we bear in our seemingly unimportant lives. Children love to sing that line from "I am Jesus' Little Lamb," "Loves me ev'ry day the same/ Even calls me by my name."

When you look through the Bible, you find that names have special significance. But we see this especially when God changes a person's name to something else. This indicates a blessing. God changed Abram's name to Abraham, "for," He explains, "I have made you a father of many nations" (Gn 17:5). One of the most remarkable name changes in the Bible was that of Abraham's grandson, Jacob. Remember the story from Genesis 32? Jacob was on his way to meet his brother Esau. He was afraid. He found himself alone one night, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. And when the man saw that Jacob had prevailed, he said: "Let Me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob responded: "I will not let You go unless You bless me!" The man said to him, "What is your name?" He said, "Jacob." And then He said: "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed." In this way, the man revealed that He was God, and not just a man, against whom Jacob was contending. The lesson is clear. When you are afraid and feel the curse of God, you may bring your problem straight to God. He will afflict you as a means of discipline. It won't be easy. But, if you take him at his word in the face of oppression – if you *demand* his blessing as he has promised – he will certainly give it to you. He will save you from your trouble and make your name important.

One of my favorite characters in the Bible wasn't manly and strong like Jacob. We don't even know her name. She was a simple Syrophenician woman with no association with the privileged name of Israel. But she too wrestled with God and prevailed. Remember the story from Matthew 15:21-28. As Jesus was passing through the region of Tyre and Sidon, a woman cries out to Jesus: "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David: My daughter is severely oppressed by a demon." But Jesus does not answer her. His disciples wanted Him to dismiss her. But she refuses to give up. She keeps pushing until Jesus responds: "I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Then she kneels before him and begs him, "Lord, help me." Jesus then stings her with the cruelest words ever recorded in Scripture: "It is not right to take the children's bread, and throw it to the dogs." But the woman without a name, not hesitating for a second, strikes right back and does not stop fighting with all her soul. She says: "Yes, Lord; but even the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their master's

table." By these words God's Son is conquered by His own grace and responds: "O woman, great is your faith; let it be done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed that very hour. God changed her name from nothing, or perhaps "little dog," to "great is your faith." Blessed.

Now think about the difference between Jacob, the famous patriarch, the emblem of courage and glory, and the nameless Canaanite woman. Was it Jacob's great bodily strength that prevailed over God, or was it his faith in God's promise? In reality, there is no difference between Jacob and the woman. It was the patriarch's *faith* that had conquered. Likewise, the woman knew and believed what St. Peter would later preach before the Jerusalem council in Acts 4: "There is no other name under heaven given to men whereby we can be saved" (Acts 4:12). Although Jacob had a great name, and was given an even greater name, both the Canaanite woman and the patriarch had to fight against God's apparent rejection. And, by his pure grace, they both found His blessing and promise. They found their name in the name given by the angel to Joseph in a dream: "You will call his name JESUS, because he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). The name of Jesus means: "The Lord saves." It is the full name of God. It is the name into which we are baptized because it is the name in which God the Father is reconciled to us. You are baptized. You will never lack the right to approach God and ask him for everything you need. God will answer you. He will bless you. He has sworn by the blood of his own Son. He has required Himself by his love to give you what He promises. Remember His Word. Keep fighting. Hold on to Christ-for-you and never let him go!

We pray:

Yes, Lord, yes! I will gladly live nameless before the world if only I may live in your presence like a little dog. And you will have mercy on me as you have promised! I know you, my dear God. You know me! For the love of Christ, I know you. There is no name too cruel, no curse too painful, that I cannot contradict it and overcome your scary face by your sweet promise. In my baptism, I bear the name of your Son, who shed his blood for me! Even when the darkness hides you, I see the light of your face in Jesus' cross; I know that you are willing and able to save me. Grant me your favor, O God, for the sake of Christ. Amen.

Mission Updates

Winter passed by quickly. This season has been filled with two seminary classes and administrative tasks in addition to regular church duties in Palmar – along with an exciting new church plant opportunity. More on that to come.

But first, on January 1, I baptized a young lady named Nely. A refugee from a nearby country with an oppressive government, she was granted safe shelter in the home of one of my members, and then (suddenly) found herself in the pew listening to the gospel for the first time in her life. Nely was an atheist. After attending for a few weeks, she approached me and asked if she could begin taking classes with me. I happily obliged, and began teaching her Luther's Small Catechism once or twice a week. She faithfully attended services every Sunday and every Wednesday and since her baptism she's become a very active member. She helps with the youth and even taught Sunday School on occasion. What a wonderful blessing this young lady has been to our church.

During the same time, another member of mine, a faithful deaconess named Carmen,

introduced me to her friend who desired to have her four sons baptized. This mother's name is Carolina. Since she lives in a neighborhood that is separated from Palmar by a dangerous road known for night crime, we could not expect her to attend our Wednesday evening divine service, so I began going there in January. Months later, on March 4th, after ongoing study of the catechism and God's Word, I baptized ten people from her community of La Piedra. The following week, we began services at her house and several more people come to hear the Word of God. They learned about the Syrophoenician woman who implored Jesus for mercy and got it. I now have five more people who have committed to attending services there and desire to be baptized. I am so excited to be a part of this great work of God. As it turns out (and as you'll see pictured in the gallery below), the family had offered a portion of their land to an Evangelical church in order to begin construction on a church building. That church got about half way, ended construction, and left the area. It is my hope to finish construction on this building so that we will have a sanctuary in which to worship.

The name of their neighborhood, "La Piedra," means "The Rock." The name Peter (Spanish: Pedro) comes from the Greek word, "petra," meaning "rock." Hence, upon the saving confession of Peter, our Lord says: "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Mt 16:18). My prayer is that Christ will build a strong church upon this Piedra, where he will nourish his children with the pure Word and bring many more sinners to the eternal fountain of his grace. God grant it for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Reflections from home, by Jenny

March 10, 2020

It has been a busy winter so far. Reflecting back over these past months, the children participated in our church's Christmas program with many of their friends from church in Palmar. They also had programs at school where they featured some of the songs, lessons and projects they've been working on.

Along with the new year, we ushered in the start of third quarter at school and continued with usual activities at church and in our missionary community. The kids are continuing with catechism classes on Thursday afternoons. Lena attends a poetry club with her mission friends one Tuesday a month. The girls are loving piano lessons with one of our dear missionary wives who has volunteered to give them lessons, and some of the kids are also in after-school art clubs, tutoring, and Spanish handwriting club. On that note, everyone's Spanish continues to improve. We are also in the process of enrolling Leif in 1st grade at school.

We are thankful for continued good health for the kids, and only seasonal allergies and some minor bug bite infections have been the main challenges health-wise. We are happy the kids seem to be flourishing in their own ways at school and we've also been able to participate in various mission activities these past months, as shown in some of the pictures below.

March 19, 2020

Since writing the above paragraphs we have moved into Spring, and as you are already aware the COVID-19 governmental restrictions have been set in motion. Our kids are now out of school until April 27 and continue with distance learning through their school's Google classroom platform. The school has done an amazing job of transitioning to this format, and

we are very thankful they can continue their studies at home. Our housekeeper has chosen to stay with us during these weeks so that she can avoid public transportation. Fortunately, we have a moderately-sized yard and fenced in rooftop with trampoline which the kids use to get daily exercise outside, and we take evening walks around our neighborhood. David is doing as many of his duties remotely as possible and is taking great precaution when venturing into the village. We have received notices from the US State Department of various other cautions which we are abiding by. As of this evening, we were advised that a state of emergency has been declared, including a Level 4 Travel warning barring all International travel coming in and out of the country. While this doesn't immediately impact us since we weren't planning on going anywhere, we are being cautious as health care and some supplies may become limited here. So we remain hopeful and are content and at peace here, with our eyes fixed on eternity and content at heart in our family's calling to bring the gospel to the people here. We also are eagerly following updates from our beloved home in the USA. You all - our dear Christian family and friends - are always all on our hearts and minds and in our prayers as this situation unfolds.

We are tentatively still planning for our upcoming 2nd homeservice, which is set to begin this summer. We will share our schedule and any necessary changes in the months ahead, in the event you are able to see us while stateside!

We are including a few extra pictures this month. We hope they help brighten your day as you share in a glimpse of our life here on the island!

Dear friends,

We thank you for reading this edition about our updates. We are going through uneasy and frustrating times. As we are faced with the fright of the corona virus, we know that it is not the world we fear, but God who made heaven and earth. This is time for us to fear God, repent, believe the gospel, and pray continuously for mercy. May God keep us safe and calm our anxiety, and may he spread the light of his gospel over all the dark places on earth. We are BLESSED to be called Christians. We thank you for all your Christian support of us as we serve these churches in the Dominican. The work continues. And you are such an important part of it. We are truly grateful. God's richest blessings to you in Christ!

¡A Dios!

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