

**A Boy Named Sue
Johnny Cash**

Well, my daddy left home when I was three
And he didn't leave much to Ma and me
Just this here guitar and an empty bottle of booze.
Now, I never blamed him cause he run and hid
But the meanest thing that he ever did
Was before he left, he went and named me 'Sue.'

Well, he must o' thought that is was quite a joke
And it got a lot of laughs from a' lot of folks,
It seems I had to fight my whole life through.
Some gal would giggle and I'd get red
And some guy'd laugh and I'd bust his head,
I tell ya, life ain't easy for a boy named 'Sue.'

Well, I grew up quick and I grew up mean,
My fist got hard and my wits got keen,
I'd roam from town to town to hide my shame.
But I made me a pledge to the moon and stars
That I'd search the honky-tonks and bars
And kill that man that give me that awful name.

Well, it was Gatlinburg in mid-July
And I just hit town and my throat was dry,
I thought I'd stop and have myself a brew.
At an old saloon on a street of mud,
There at a table, dealing stud,
Sat the dirty, mangy dog that named me 'Sue.'

Well, I knew that snake was my own sweet dad
From a worn-out picture that my mother had,
And I knew that scar on his cheek and his evil eye.
He was bent and gray and old,
And I looked at him and my blood ran cold
And I said: "My name is 'Sue!' how do you do!
Now you gonna die!" (yeah, thats what i told him)

Well, I hit him hard right between the eyes
And he went down but, to my surprise,
He come up with a knife and cut off a piece of my ear.
But I smashed a chair right across his teeth
And we crashed through the wall and into the street
Kicking and a' gouging in the mud and the blood and the beer.

I tell ya, I've fought tougher men
But I really can't remember when,
He kicked like a mule and he bit like a crocodile.
I heard him laugh and then I heard him cuss,
He went for his gun, but I pulled mine first,
Then He looked at me and I saw him smile.

And he said: "Son, this world is rough
And if a man's gonna make it, he's gotta be tough
And I know I wouldn't be there to help you along.
So I give ya that name and I said good-bye
I knew you'd have to get tough or die
And it's that name that helped to make you strong."

Now you just fought one hell of a fight
And I know you hate me, and you got the right
To kill me now, and I wouldn't blame you if you do.
But before you do you ought to thank me
For the gravel in ya guts and the spit in ya eye
Cause I'm the son-of-a-bitch that named you 'Sue'.

What would you do, what could i do?
I got all choked up and I threw down my gun
And I called him my pa, and he called me his son,
And I come away with a different point of view.
And I think about him, now and then,
Every time I fought and every time I'd win,
And if I ever have a son, I think I'm gonna name him
Bill or George! Anything but sue! I still hate that name!

We all grew up with the saying, “Sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me!” I can remember my parents teaching me this little saying as I came home from school one day feeling very hurt about the names that the other kids called me. How did it work for you?

It is the names that hurt, sometimes even more than sticks and stones.

Names matter because what we name something, how we name it, is to a great extent what it is to us. Sometimes it is just silliness like renaming “French fries” to “American Fries”

We are creatures of language, and though language does not exhaust human reality, it qualifies it in profound ways. It follows, then, that naming can be hurtful, and that it can also be healing or helpful. The ways we name ourselves, one another, the time we live in, and the world cannot be taken for granted. We must look at them carefully and see if they hurt or help. Peg and I have a friend named “Harriet”.

So, how are we to “name” this time?

For us here at Shadow Rock it is a season of new beginnings. We come back from the July sabbatical and you have a new pastor and a new music director. In the larger expression of the UCC we have a new conference minister and on the national level we have a window of opportunity to announce to our society the strength and virtues of our uniqueness as an inclusive and progressive denomination. What are we to think about this time? It is important for us to “name” this new season. Do not doubt the power of “naming”. Just like our friend “Harriet” claimed a new life with a new name so naming has power. Do not doubt the power of “naming” for it has the element of “claiming”.

**Do not doubt the power of naming....
IT HAS THE POWER OF CLAIMING!!**

The story of Jacob is the story of the power of naming, claiming, and blessing. Jacob’s whole life was about deception and getting the advantage so as to implement the con. Jacob’s name meant deceiver, usurper, and trickster. He lied and took advantage of his father and his brother and he was lied to and tricked by his father-in-law. Jacob carried around a spirituality, an orientation toward life, that put him in opposition to everyone and everything. He had to be on the lookout constantly for an opportunity to deceive or be deceived. What a hard way to live.

It was from this spiritual, emotional, and social place that Jacob was confronted with a wrestling match. He thought he had struggles before but they had only just begun. Fleeing his family history had been bad enough; wrestling with God was a different matter altogether. Jacob Could not run and the stranger kept asking Jacob, “What is your name?” Jacob didn’t want to tell him because Jacob did not want his stinking conniving past to keep hanging onto him.

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They wrestled throughout the night hours until daybreak, at which point the stranger crippled Jacob with a blow to his hip that disabled him with a limp for the rest of his life. By then Jacob knew what had happened, declaring, "I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared" (Genesis 32:30). In the process, Jacob the Deceiver, for such was the meaning of "Jacob," received a new name, Israel, which means "He struggles with God." Most important and unlikely of all, at the conclusion of that riverbank struggle, we read that God "blessed him there".

The story is a metaphor for the mysterious way we are wounded and blessed as we encounter the deepest experiences of human existence.

GOD NAMED AND BLESSED JACOB IN THE STRUGGLE!!! GOD DID NOT BLESS JACOB BY SPARING HIM FROM THE STRUGGLE OR SPARING JACOB FROM THE WOUND ACQUIRED IN THAT STRUGGLE!!

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"Jacob does what all of us must do," writes Joan Chittister, "if, in the end, we too are to become true. Jacob confronts in himself the things that are wounding him, admits his limitations, accepts his situation, rejoins the world, and moves on."

Jacob's struggle reminds us of this truth, that God is so very good, but God is not safe. We may well struggle with God through the night, but by daybreak God only intends to bless us.

I did visit another worship service during the sabbath and I saw some TV preaching. I sensed in their message that if you believe the right thing at the right time and believe it hard enough then you will have peace, rest, and prosperity. There was no sense of what it means to "struggle with god". I think we have enough intellectual and spiritual integrity and I hope enough emotional strength to struggle with God.

This is a new beginning for many of us and we have the hope and excitement that comes with the newness of things but I want us to also name and claim a new season of struggling with God.

What I think this means is that faith is so much more than magical thinking and God being a genie or Santa Claus.

I think struggling with God means struggling with the big questions of purpose and meaning.

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I think struggling with God means struggling with the big questions of how to live in right relationship to history and the powers that shape history.

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I think struggling with God means struggling with the big questions of justice and peace.

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I think struggling with God means struggling with the big questions of how we are to order our communal life together so we live out our covenant.

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The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein says that "The Truth can be spoken only by someone who is already at home in it; not by someone who still lives in falsehood and reaches out from falsehood towards truth on just one occasion."

Thus, in a spiritual sense, we can make many claims about what is true, but these statements comprise no real Truth until we enact them as a community of faithful and struggling believers. The story of Jacob and Wittgenstein challenges us to see that simple mental ascent to the search for life's ultimate possibilities is not enough to make it really True. What is needed is a continual reaching-out from falsehood toward truth. This is what it means to be faithful and to struggle with God.

It is important for us to "name" and "claim" this new season. While the name of our congregation is Shadow Rock Congregational United Church of Christ, I think we are the kind of congregation that shares Jacob's new name; "Those who struggle with God." And know that out of the struggle comes new beginnings and many blessings.

WE NEED STRENGTH AND GRACE FOR THE STRUGGLE.....