

Dear South Dakota Synod,

Grace and peace in the name of the Risen Christ!

Many times throughout my life, I wished for a simple name. Take Mary for example, it's pretty unpretentious and universal. But for personal reasons, my parents chose to name me 'Constanze'. Over the years my name grew on me, so much so that I no longer can imagine having a different name. In fact, I love my name. Admittedly, my name can cause people to pause with hesitancy when they don't quite know how to pronounce it. Some reluctantly try. Some confidently call me 'Constance', others ask; "How do you say your first name? Could you spell that for me?" Either way, I am used to people tripping over my first name, and I am usually prepared with an answer before they even ask. I either slowly spell my name, or I invite people to think of 'George Costanza' from the sitcom 'Seinfeld', which will get them to lightening up, unwrinkled their forehead and go; "ah, yup, now I get it." Let's just say that I haven't met anyone yet that just looks at my name and right out of the gate is able to pronounce it perfectly.

Except, when I went to buy bread at the local bakery the other day, that is. I was on my way to the office and quick made a stop at the bakery to stock up our freezer with a few loaves of bread to have on hand at home. Everything about buying bread went as expected until the clerk asked me if I am a rewards member, to which I replied that I am. I gave her my phone number to look up my account. And that's when it happened. I met Jesus at the local bakery! The clerk looked up my account and says; "Constanze". I remember that I heard her say my name perfectly, but it hadn't registered. Therefore, I readily jumped in with my usual spiel, the spelling of my name and an explanation. I had barely started to spell my name though, maybe I had made it to the third letter, when I paused. I looked at the clerk, paused and with great astonishment said to her; "you just perfectly said my name."

What unfolded was a conversation that only grew more tender by every word that we exchanged. She responded that she loves the name. I told her that I love it too, but have yet to encounter someone that can pronounce it. I even asked her if we had met before. After all, I do meet a lot of people, and in all honesty, I do not remember all of you all the time. The clerk said that we had never met. Finally, I asked her, how she would know how to pronounce my name. She looked at me and with a matter-of-fact voice went on to say; "well, that's Mozart's wife's name." By now, I had been smiling and admittedly had a warm feeling surge through my body. Someone knew me by name. Someone I had never met before was able to pronounce my name without me needing to offer an explanation or justification. I have to admit, that just plain and simple felt great.

But when the clerk stated that Mozart's wife's name was Konstanze, I have to admit I was a bit more than just surprised. Because the very reason I am named Constanze is because of Konstanze, Mozart's wife. My mom was an avid Mozart lover, and when she found out that she will have a daughter, she left no room for negotiations, I was going to be Constanze, end of discussion. But you need to know that no one knows that (well, now people do, because I am sharing it here) but until I went to the bakery and encountered the clerk only a select few knew. Therefore, you might be able to imagine my surprise; "how do you know all this stuff?" She just shrugged her

shoulders, smiled and responded: “I am just a classical music nerd, that’s why.” I can honestly say that I left the bakery with a spring in my step, a smile on my face and a feeling of warmth in my heart. All day long I thought to myself; “Someone knows me by name.”

When, in John’s Gospel, Mary encounters Jesus in the garden, she mistakes him for the gardener until he calls her by name. Within a split-second Mary’s world was no longer filled with grief and anguish, but with the assurance that her redeemer lived. Earlier in the story Jesus had healed her from demons, he had restored her to live in community again. Healing and restoring her had forged a deep bond between them. Those among us who are invited to intentionally accompany people at the time of personal loss know the deep bond I am talking about. It’s the liminal space, where trust and faith merge with promise and grief to forge a powerful bond. Jesus and Mary shared such a bond. So, when at the resurrection dawn Jesus called her by her name, Mary instantaneously grasped in faith that life had won once again. But this time, death had been defeated forever. She takes off running becoming the very first resurrection Sunday preacher. Her sermon is brief, but impactful; “I have seen the Lord.”

In the waters of baptism, you also have been called by name and made God’s own. While the world is quick to hashtag you all sorts of things, God only hashtags you with #belovedchildofgod. He calls you by your name. And in that name, in that beloved-ness is your identity. Death, sin and brokenness, dear South Dakota Synod, hold no power over you, because he has risen! He has risen indeed. Now go and run with Mary, because you have seen the Lord.

Journeying with you in Christ,

Bishop Constanze