

Psalm 105:1-10

¹O give thanks to the LORD, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples.

²Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wonderful works.

³Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.

⁴Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually.

⁵Remember the wonderful works he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he uttered,

⁶O offspring of his servant Abraham, children of Jacob, his chosen ones.

⁷He is the LORD our God; his judgments are in all the earth.

⁸He is mindful of his covenant forever, of the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations,

⁹the covenant that he made with Abraham, his sworn promise to Isaac,

¹⁰which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant,

Matthew 18:1-5, 10-14

18At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" ²He called a child, whom he put among them, ³and said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. ⁵Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

¹⁰"Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones; for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven. ¹²What do you think? If a shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? ¹³And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. ¹⁴So it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.

Greetings on behalf of ECH, Every Child's Hope, formerly Evangelical Children's Home! It is truly a pleasure and privilege to be with you this morning. I appreciate the opportunity to share in your fellowship and worship and explore our common covenant!

As I prepared for this service, I thought about sharing a brief word or two about the evolution of our name. And, as I thought about this, it occurred to me that your congregation may have lived through a name changes with this agency, from its original German Protestant Orphans Home, to, Evangelical Children's Home, to now Every Child's Hope. Every Child's Hope, actually came from a constituent of ECH, someone understanding of our history, invested in our mission, and supportive of our many different ministries. I thought about sharing with you the evolution of ECH from its original functioning as an orphanage providing shelter, security, and structure, education and religious formation (a mission aptly conveyed in its first two names) to its present role as a multi-faceted service provider specializing in:

- residential treatment
- independent and transitional living programs
- intensive in-home services such as family and personal counseling, family reunification, foster care and family case management
- Head Start early education for low income families
- And a K thru 12 alternative school for children with emotional and behavioral struggles

But, then, I thought about name changes in general. And I began to consider the name changes I am most familiar with in the texts of our common heritage: the scriptures of the old and new testaments. I

reflected on when they happened and why they happened. And I realized they didn't just happen.

Name changes didn't just happen because people got tired of their old names, or because people thought they would be received better by others with a different name. Name changes never happened because of political correctness.

Names were changed because something happened in the lives of people so that they could never see themselves or their world in the same way again. Sometimes this reorientation came as people, like Abraham, stepped out in faith on the promises of God into new and uncertain futures. Sometimes it came when people, like Jacob of the Hebrew scriptures or Saul from the Greek scriptures, wrestled and struggled with God and conscience and the weight of their past in the dawning of a new day. Sometimes it came when people, like the early followers of Jesus, grabbed hold of the dream they had, left what they had always known, and worked for the fulfillment of something bigger than themselves.

Name changes always happened in response to the call of God in the midst of an ever-changing world. And name changes always happened in the context of covenant that promised faithful presence, grace, and mercy for all the changes to come.

Our world has changed a lot in the last 150-plus years. And the people ECH serves have changed too.

The children and families served by ECH are vulnerable to the ravages of dysfunctional and under-functioning family systems, to the brutality of abuse, to the devastation of broken promises, to the pitfalls

of underfunded social services, to the bitter consequences of bad choices and limited coping skills, and to the uncertainty of what the future holds.

For example, youth in our residential program each has a unique story and situation, though, the majority of youth we serve have experienced more than their share of trauma in their short lives. From abuse and neglect in their myriad forms, to multiple losses of loved ones through natural and violent means, the challenges these young people face have brought the nagging of worry and fear and the weight of shame and regret. Beset by a significant lack of healthy coping skills, some of our residents have turned to self-harm as a means to control a small piece of their lives. Others have turned to drugs and alcohol to self-medicate their pain. Many carry grief and anger that threaten to overflow and overwhelm them.

They are seeking a way through the destruction and devastation and despair that they have known. They are hoping for a new chance to be with their families. Or, they are hoping for a new family. They need safety and they want to learn how to be safe with and for others.

At Every Child's Hope, we work to offer a safe place into which the children we serve may enter and share some of their vulnerability. We listen as they tell their stories, vent their frustrations, cry out their pain, dream dreams and see visions of what their lives might be like some day. Fortunately for the individuals and families served by ECH, there are many safe spaces offered to them. Whether in offices or apartments, cafeterias or car rides, recreational activities or reading classes, the many professionals of ECH show up every day to offer compassionate caring, structured support and accountability, and faces

of friendship to the hundreds of lives touched by the services of Every Child's Hope.

Sometimes we help to write stories of success. Sometimes we are frustrated by our own limitations and those of the systems we work within. Sometimes we witness further self-destruction of individuals and families, despite our best efforts.

Regardless of the outcome of our efforts, we continue the evolving and enduring work of ECH. We seek to live out the covenant we make with those who support us and those who come to us: to serve the children, youth and families who enter into our care. We sit with them and listen to them and offer them a fresh perspective to help guide them through the wake of their past and into a new future. We educate them and teach them new skills to navigate the difficult times that are still to come. We ask for their honesty and offer our encouragement. We respond to crises and losses that occur in their lives while they are with us. We work with individuals and we work with families to repair what is broken, to shore up what is crumbling, and to strengthen what is solid. We do these things so that those who come into our lives may further the pursuit of health and wholeness in their own lives.

And you covenant with us in our mission every time you think about the work we do and the people we serve and offer a prayer on our behalf. You help us and those we serve every time you commit your financial resources to support the work we do. You keep covenant with us every time you act to make our schools and communities safer for children or advocate for more mental health services.

You help us, and we help those we serve because it takes all of us working together to live out our covenant with God, promised to our ancestors and now entrusted to us. It takes all of us working together to survive the changes in our world and in our own selves. It takes all of us working together to overcome our fears, to right the wrongs in our lives, to deal with the uncertainties that face us every day, to bear our frustrations and our grief, and to change and grow.

Not one of us, nor one of those ECH seeks to serve, should be lost to the ravages of this world, or to the changes that would leave us locked in fear of what's to come, or to doubts that would consume our energy for what God has for us to do. So let us give thanks to God, for the past and for the future, for the challenges of today and the promises that sustain us. Let us seek God and God's strength for the work that God calls us to. And let us remember the God who keeps covenant with us, that we might keep covenant together.

Amen.

Gracious and loving God, who loves all and forgets none, we bring to you our prayers for all your children.

For all we love, watch over, and care for...

For all who suffer with illness and disease in body, mind or spirit, those who have been hospitalized, and those who are now at home...

For those who grieve and mourn the loss of people, places or opportunities...

For those who struggle with the daily challenges and stresses of life...

For those who labor for peace in the midst of volatile and violent situations...

For our law enforcement branches here and our military personnel near and far...

For our world leaders...

For students and teachers as another year of learning and growing begins...

For this church and all communities of faith...

For those we have forgotten, whom you never fail to remember...