My brothers and sisters in Christ, let us pray. Lord God of our Pentecost new starts, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts always be acceptable in your sight, our strength and our redeemer, Amen.

There was a time where brand names were trusted. We probably remember some of the more famous ones that are no longer with us. What ones did you grow up with? (take all answers). OK, how about this one… ‘Sears is where America Shops’. They had this brand of tools known as ‘Craftsman’, and their hook was that if one of those tools ever broke, regardless of the cause, they would replace it for free. Of course that got you into the Sears store and probably spending more money on other stuff, too, but it did engender loyalty, and so I didn’t tend to shop at the others, JC Penney or Montgomery Ward.

How about these days when the pollen counts are just through the roof, and we’re sneezing our brains out, what do we ask for? A Kleenex? And if someone handed us a box of facial tissue of some other brand, we’d probably take it. But a nose cloth, to me, is a Kleenex.

So there are just some verbal references that remain tied to a particular item. We used to make Xerox copies, not photocopies. Or as kids we’d ask for a glass of Kool-Aid, long before the days of flavored water and Crystal Light. We probably don’t notice the difference between some of these things, but the names still stick to our common lexicon. When’s the last time we asked some transparent adhesive cellophane? Didn’t we just say, ‘pass me the Scotch tape’? We don’t reference thanking the 3M corporation for its contribution and it’s the same with their Post-It notes. What else would we call them?

Sometimes, though, it’s not the brand that matters, it’s the price. There’s just no discernible quality between Reynolds Wrap and aluminum foil, is there? Sometimes the difference is only a matter of pride, as in a designer clothing label. My mother used to tell me that JC Penney plain pocket jeans were just fine, being only $10 and all. Levi’s were for the rich kids from the other side of town.

Does the brand name matter, then? Sometimes. There might be a little better taste, function, or the real deal is a little more reliable or has a better warranty.

But life isn’t always about whether we have Pepsi or Coca Cola. Let’s up the game just a little. When we have our life and health at risk, we seek dependability and assurance. We want an electrical item certified by Underwriter’s Laboratories, UL tested and approved. Household cleaners that have the Good Housekeeping seal of approval. American Red Cross vouches for the medical kits in our cars and boats. When we want quality we will pay for it, right? We just want to rest a little easier with a company we know.

What does this have to do with anything, you ask?

I’ll tell ya.

The Risen Christ says to his disciples, “Go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit”. With those words, we know God is a triune presence—Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer. This is who God is for us. Not a generic god who gets lost in the shuffle of greater and lesser gods or who has no role in our lives. Our God isn’t a god who set the earth spinning and disappears, never to be heard from again. And our God is not a vain God requiring appeasement in order for us to have good luck or good fortune.

Nope. None of these. And perhaps most importantly, our God is not a vague presence who conforms to what we believe as long as we’re sincere about it. Remember, God isn’t created in our image. It’s the other way around.

Our God is a God who acts in our history, our lives, and in our midst, even when we can’t see it in real time. Our God is a God who made a covenant with Abraham and Sarah promising that ALL the peoples of the earth have been blessed and would be. Ours is a God who leads oppressed people out of bondage and slavery. Who gives us provision when there is none to be found so that we don’t have to go back to our captors, but go forward to figure out the next chapter of our lives.

Our God is the one who became human, felt what we feel, lived how we live, and despite all of that, taught us what it meant to let go of spite, jealousy, anger, and enemies, and told us truly, truly, I tell you, about love.

Our God pours out the Spirit, the one with whom we are co-inheritors in baptism rites and rituals. The God who says he is always here for us, and that nothing can separate us from that love, not even death. We share in the mission of that risen Christ to tell people of God’s creation and redeeming work, making God’s name known through time and place.

So I’ll leave with this final thought.

What’s in a name? A lot. The best brand names are those companies that walk hand-in-hand with us, backing us up with a reputation, guarantee, and service when things go wrong. When it comes to stuff that’s important, which would we rather have? Generic products with a 1-800 number to nowhere, or quality, reputation, and assurance of a name brand? The same holds true for our God.

We bear God’s name and Christ’s mission and so proclaim this to the world to know God has been, is and will be with all the peoples of the earth, and to learn to live in love. And to see that reflected in us. Christians need to start acting the part of loving more than just who is in their band of followers or hierarchies. God is too big a brand to cheapen it with things that don’t represent God’s best foot forward. That may be a down day for us, for sure. But I’ll bet if we are authentic, people will forgive us. Let’s hope we can forgive back.

I hope this day and each day you also expect more from your own witness, because God is a really good brand worth talking about.

Thanks be to God, Amen.