

**Cush fathered Nimrod; he was the first on earth to be a mighty man. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord. Therefore it is said, “Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the Lord.” *Gen. 10:8-9***

If you are ever in the upper peninsula of Michigan you can go to the town of Watersmeet and get your picture taken in front of a high school gym with the words “Home of the Nimrods” painted on the side. I’ve done it with my kids. It makes for a funny picture. No, it isn’t graffiti; that actually is their nickname. Upper Michigan, of course, is an area where hunting is major part of the culture, so it makes sense.

Our picture is ironic and funny, of course, because we know the term nimrod to mean a silly dunce or oafish buffoon. The reason the word has come to mean that is because Bugs Bunny sarcastically referred to Elmer Fudd as a “nimrod” (a mighty hunter) after making a fool of him. So in modern parlance, which takes its cues from pop culture more than Genesis, the word nimrod refers almost exclusively to being a doofus, not a mighty hunter. The new meaning still makes sense Biblically, since Nimrod is usually credited with starting the Tower of Babel, which also ended badly. So should Watersmeet change their nickname? Tough question. History and tradition on one side, the inevitable ravages of time, change, and potential misunderstanding on the other.

What about our nickname here at St. Paul’s. When we have games in the gym with fans (those were the days!) the cheerleaders always say, “Stand up! Be proud! Say your name! Out loud!” and everyone in the stands responds “WE ARE THE SPARTANS!” Of course, the Spartans were pagans and were known as the anti-intellectual enemies of the more enlightened Athenians. What’s more, they lost to their main rival. So it is a tad ironic that a Christian school playing sports against rival schools would want to be the Spartans.

But to a great degree such criticism misses the point. Spartans are a part of the history of Western Civilization and their reputation was for fearsome athletic prowess. So it is a good name for a team. We shouldn’t change it just because there are objectionable things about it.

My alma mater, Valparaiso University is considering a name change. They are the Crusaders. But many of the students nowadays come from Muslim countries, and of course the whole point of the crusades was to take back the Holy Land from Muslim conquerors. So the crusades are still a sore spot almost a thousand years later. I think Crusaders is a perfectly good nickname and mascot. We aren’t claiming the crusaders were morally pure and spotless as a wind-driven snow (they weren’t by any telling of the story). We aren’t even claiming that they won. Like the Spartans, they put up a good fight but eventually lost.

We might think we’re being humble by eliminating the people and events in our history that were very flawed and even in some cases just plain bad. But really it is an act of arrogance. We stand in judgment over those (admittedly bad) people through whom God bequeathed to us our place in His story. We ought not put ourselves in the place of judge over the people of the distant past.

This is especially true for Christians. God only works through flawed sinners. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob weren’t such moral pillars. But they are our patriarchs in the faith. Who are we to be ashamed of them? St. Paul called himself chief of sinners, Martin Luther said some really vicious things about Jews, and church history is full of great people who weren’t so great except for how God used them. We should be very careful about disregarding the accomplishments of such people because we think ourselves morally superior to them. Whoever you are, whatever your history, you can be grateful that God condescended to work through flawed people and institutions to spread the Word and bring it even to us. To be ashamed of the name God gave you is sinful pride at work. The right kind of pride is the pride that says we are who we are because of the working of God through sinners like us in history. Stand up! Be proud! Say your name! Out loud!

In Christ, Pastor Speckhard