

Hallowed Be Thy Name

Ideas from the time of my Sabbatical continue to rattle around in my head and these last few weeks before we move into the season of Advent seems like a propitious time to develop them and share them with you. This morning, I'd like to return to a well-known passage that we looked at back in the Spring as part of a series on the Sermon on the Mount. The Lord's Prayer has been an integral part of Christian worship since Jesus taught it to his disciples. I am unaware of any Christian group that does not use the prayer and the majority of Christians use the prayer in corporate worship or private devotion far more often than the once-a-month communion setting of our tradition. Perhaps that is why the Lord's Prayer was chosen as an appropriate topic for the adult Bible study at Taizé for the week I was there in June. I must confess, when I first learned that this universally repeated fragment of Jesus' teaching was to be our focus, I was a little disappointed. After all, I'd just finished studying it in its context in Matthew in order to preach about it only weeks before my departure for Europe. I was skeptical that I would learn anything new. One of these days, I'm going to learn better. One can study a single story or pericope in the Bible almost endlessly and learn something new nearly every day as one's perspective changes and the insight of others is revealed. So, I was surprised when I shouldn't have been that I ended up taking about a page of closely written notes on each day at Taizé from the teaching of Brother Pedro on the prayer. I went away from that experience feeling blessed by both the teaching and by the often penetrating conversation of my study group on the subject.

And that, I thought, was that. Clearly God had wanted me to continue my learning on the most famous prayer of Christ and so I had. I figured I'd probably do more serious thinking about the Lord's Prayer in about three years when those verses rolled around in the lectionary again. But God poked at me a little more. The trip to Coventry that Connie and I took during our time in the U.K. was a pilgrimage I'd long wanted to take. I wanted to see for myself the famous bronze by Sir Jacob Epstein of the Archangel Michael's victory over Lucifer, which had featured so prominently in the illustrated magazine appeal for funds to complete the cathedral which was given to all the children in the Church of England schools I attended as a youngster. I wanted to experience the pathos of the bombed-out shell of the medieval cathedral and the soaring glory of the modern building dedicated to peace and reconciliation. And, indeed, I was not disappointed in that experience. But what I didn't expect or at least remember were the plaques mounted on the walls of the old cathedral that called my attention, once again, back to the Lord's Prayer.

Before I get into the message of the plaques for me on that day at Coventry and for us here in Lynnwood today, let's take a quick look at them. According to tradition, after one reads each plaque, one should repeat the refrain, "Holy, Holy, Holy; Lord God of Hosts; Heaven and earth are full of thy glory." So read along with me, if you will, as they appear on the screen:

Hallowed be Thy Name in Industry:

God be in my hands and in my making.

Holy, Holy, Holy; Lord God of Hosts;

Heaven and earth are full of thy glory.

Hallowed be Thy Name in the Arts:

God be in my senses and in my creating.

Holy, Holy, Holy; Lord God of Hosts;

Heaven and earth are full of thy glory.

Hallowed be Thy Name in the Home:

God be in my heart and in my loving.

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Holy, Holy, Holy; Lord God of Hosts;
Heaven and earth are full of thy glory.
Hallowed be Thy Name in Commerce:
God be at my desk and in my trading.
Holy, Holy, Holy; Lord God of Hosts;
Heaven and earth are full of thy glory.
Hallowed be Thy Name in Suffering:
God be in my pain and in my enduring.
Holy, Holy, Holy; Lord God of Hosts;
Heaven and earth are full of thy glory.
Hallowed be Thy Name in Government:
God be in my plans and in my deciding.
Holy, Holy, Holy; Lord God of Hosts;
Heaven and earth are full of thy glory.
Hallowed be Thy Name in Education:
God be in my mind and in my growing.
Holy, Holy, Holy; Lord God of Hosts;
Heaven and earth are full of thy glory.
Hallowed be Thy Name in Recreation:
God be in my limbs and in my leisure.
Holy, Holy, Holy; Lord God of Hosts;
Heaven and earth are full of thy glory.

While the plaques are modern in appearance and the message of many of them reflects a modern sensibility, they also pay homage to the medieval practice of various merchants' guilds giving gifts to cathedrals to pay for a portion of the building that would then memorialize the guild. One of the few surviving portions of the old cathedral at Coventry and the only usable space after the Blitz was the chapel or meeting room of the Cappers Guild, the group responsible for promoting the craft and trade of woolen hats during medieval times. Just as chapels and windows would have reminded the medieval worshipper of the necessity of the presence of God in all aspects of their lives, so the plaques call modern visitors to think of how God's presence is still necessary in all aspects of our lives.

Before we look at the individual messages of the plaques, let us consider the theme that unites them: Hallowed be thy name. As I remarked when we studied the Lord's Prayer in March, there are two components of this short phrase that may seem odd to us. First, there is that funny old word, hallowed. Except for its use in traditional versions of the Lord's Prayer, we just don't hear it much. Oh, we're coming up on the one day of the year when modern people use the word a great deal, whether they know they are doing so or not. I refer, of course, to All Saints or All Hallows' Evening, which centuries of use have slurred into Halloween. And, for those who enjoyed the long-running series of books and movies which just came to a climax this year, there is Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows. But does either of these uses really shed light on the musty old word?

Dictionary definitions of hallow might include some of the following: to revere; to sanctify; to consecrate; to highly venerate; to make holy. Something hallowed is something set apart, not

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meant for casual usage, something treated with the greatest respect. The objects referred to as “hallows” by Harry Potter and friends were powerful instruments of magic, not to be employed except in great need and at great risk to the one who wielded them inappropriately. To hallow God’s name echoes that part of what we call the Ten Commandments which says, “You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses the name.”

When we pray, “Our Father... hallowed be thy name,” we are literally praying for God to make God’s name holy, which seems at least a little strange. Isn’t God’s name holy by definition? Remember the refrain attached to the recitation of the words of the Coventry plaques: “Holy, Holy, Holy; Lord God of Hosts; Heaven and earth are full of thy glory.” It is a reference, as was our hymn this morning, to the great song of praise of the angels, recorded by Isaiah. The triple repetition is an expression of the truth that God is most holy, most other, most revered. And the name of God is holiest of all.

In the ancient world, including the time of Jesus, a name was not just a word but something revelatory of the person to whom it was attached. We may not think much about this these days, but we are still careful to give our children names that we think will reflect well on them in years to come. Nobody names their kid Adolf or Benedict or Judas these days, yet in their time these names were quite popular. It only took one person of abominable character to remove those names from the realm of use. One of my friends, whose first name is also Mark, suggested to me that we respond to Mars Hill Church’s recent threat to sue other churches who use that Biblical name by suing Mark Driscoll for misusing our name. We’re both older than he is, so we had it first. But I digress...

According to a sermon I read this week, the Jews had 16 different names in the Old Testament for God that reflected God’s nature. I haven’t counted lately but my first “grown-up” Bible, given to me by my parents when I was baptized in 1970, had a chart embedded in the text of the prophetic book of Malachi that traced those names. There’s also a graphic representation on the front of our bulletin this morning of some of the names used for God in both Testaments. The word in Hebrew below that picture is the four letter word that is the most holy name of God. The Jews worked so hard to keep God’s name holy that they stopped even saying it out loud. Since ancient Hebrew writing had only consonants and not vowels, we actually don’t know how the name was pronounced. When Jews reciting Scripture come to this name, sometimes called the Tetragrammaton, meaning “four letters,” the traditionally pronounce the word “Adonai,” which we translate as Lord. In an effort to make the Tetragrammaton pronounceable, German scholars added the vowel sounds of “Adonai” to the Hebrew consonants. Since the “y” sound is written with a “J” in German and the “w” sound with a “V,” the English transliteration gave us the name Jehovah. More recently, Biblical scholars have come to consensus around the pronunciation “Yahweh.” They take their cues from forms of the ancient Hebrew word meaning “to be” and the translation of God’s revelation to Moses of God’s name in Exodus 3 as “I AM.” But observant Jews still decline to pronounce this word and regard scholarly attempts to unravel its mysteries as foolish if not blasphemous. Since the word “Lord” has come to have negative connotations of patriarchal domination, you will often hear Jews use the term “The Eternal One” or simply “Ha-Shem,” “the Name.” The Vatican recently released an opinion stating that the name Yahweh should not be used in liturgy to avoid offense to Jews but when I asked some

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Jewish friends their opinion on the subject, I was told that they felt that what we Christians did in worship was none of their business, so I will continue to use that name of God, respectfully, along with the others that we are accustomed to.

But as we consider hallowing God's name, I think it is useful, as Brother Pedro suggested at Taizé, to look at that passage in Exodus when God identified God's own name to Moses. What is it that God says about God's self? Listen to Exodus 3, verse 13 through the first part of verse 18: "But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'Yahweh, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations. Go and assemble the elders of Israel, and say to them, 'Yahweh, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying: I have given heed to you and to what has been done to you in Egypt. I declare that I will bring you up out of the misery of Egypt, to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.' They will listen to your voice..." God is revealed not only as the One Who Is, who exists more fully than any thing which God has created, but also as the One Who Promises and is Faithful. By self-identifying as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, God reminds all the generations to come of God's promises to the patriarchs that they will be a blessing to all humankind. God also reveals to Moses that God is the One Who Hears the Cries of the Oppressed and as the One Who Will Deliver Those Who Live in Misery.

This should be a key revelation for those of us who are called by the name of that same God. Our faith tells us that Christ Jesus, the prophet of Nazareth, was also the self-revelation of God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, and we are known, since the time of the early Church in Antioch, as Christians – those who follow the Christ. Part of God's name being hallowed is the necessity for those called by God's name – Christians, Jews and Muslims alike – to act in ways consonant with that name. We, too, must be faithful. We, too, must hear the cries of the oppressed and deliver those who live in misery.

Of course, God's people can and have brought shame on the name of God by identifying themselves with God and then acting in very un-God-like ways. We certainly all know people who have a terrible opinion of Christians because of the acts of some who self-identify as followers of Jesus. Sometimes, it is particularly hard to be identified as a Baptist. Our friend, Rev. Curtis Price, now pastor of First Baptist Salt Lake City was on a radio show in that city that I listened to this week. In discussing the peculiarities of being Baptist in a Mormon town for a general audience, Curtis allowed as how he often began describing his church by saying, "Well, we're Baptists, but..." Some of us, I know have had the same experience. You don't have to be as notoriously intemperate as some well-known Baptists to cause God's name to be dishonored. There's the famous story of the impatient motorist who cut off another driver, then honked, shook his fist and flashed the finger at his victim. Upon being pulled over by a cop after this display of bad manners, he asked "why?" Said the officer, "I saw what you did and then I noticed the fish insignia on your trunk and the bumper stickers that said, "Honk if you Love

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Jesus,” and “Ask me about First Baptist Church,” and I thought you must have stolen the car.” When we pray for God to hallow God’s holy name, we are also praying that God keep us from causing that name to be dishonored.

Let us now return, in the few minutes remaining, to the plaques of Coventry. The panels remind us that we should pray that God’s name should be hallowed in our whole lives – in our lives at home and at school, in work and in play, in our acts of joyful creation and in our moments of deepest anguish. Being faithful in reflecting the holiness of God’s name is not something that we can do in an hour or two on Sunday morning. It is not something that we can set aside in order to make a business deal. It is not something that we can do when we are with one group of people but not with another. We are called to let God work in us 24/7/365. “Hallowed be Thy Name in Industry” means that whatever we make or prepare for the use of another must be done as if it was for God. “Hallowed be Thy Name in the Arts” means that those who create and perform must seek to honestly give shape and voice to a representation of the truth, even if it is dark, but also seek to lead their audiences toward the light. Those of us who make up the audience for the artists must encourage them in this regard and we are likewise called to seek out art that is honest and true, not squalid or hateful. When we hallow God’s Name in the home, we act in love towards those who are nearest us, putting their needs ahead of our desires, being, as Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “subject to one another out of reverence for Christ,” revering, hallowing the Name of Christ. “Hallowed be Thy Name in Commerce” reminds us that in today’s economy, not all of us make things, not even things as insubstantial as sermons, but instead make our living by simply buying and selling that which others make or by lending money or by trading commodities and stocks and bonds. Even in this make-believe world of finance, the deep meaning of God’s name as compassionate savior must be honored. We are called to hallow God’s Name in suffering, remembering that Christ also suffered as we do from physical pain and from the spiritual pains of loneliness, betrayal, fear and temptation. Like Jesus, we are called to endure and to rise above suffering to reach our full human potential and give glory to God. Whether or not we actually work in what we think of as Government, we all make plans and decisions and we all vote for government officials. These activities must also be pursued with the Will of God in mind. God has given each of us a brain and a mind. To honor God, we are called to make the most of these gifts, pursuing as much education as we can with vigor and with an eye to being effective ambassadors of God in our culture. And, finally, we ask God to be hallowed in our recreation, in our limbs and in our leisure. As Grantland Rice famously wrote, “For when the One Great Scorer comes / To mark against your name, / He writes - not that you won or lost - / But how you played the Game.” What we do for fun is revelatory of our characters every bit as much as what we do in earnest.

Jesus’ instruction to his disciples, including us, that we should pray to our Heavenly Father that God’s name should be hallowed is closely related to his affirmation that the greatest of the commandments is to love Yahweh our God with all our hearts and with all our souls and with all our minds. In other words, we are to love and honor God with all of our lives. But we should also remember that he said that the second greatest commandment is like the first: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” As we conclude our time together by singing the words of the Lord’s Prayer, let the repeated refrain of “hallowed be thy name” sink deeply into you, reminding you of how we are to live to keep our part of that request. But remember also that as we sing about daily bread and the forgiveness of debts, we pray not just for ourselves but for our

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neighbors, whoever and wherever they may be. May God bless the reading, the hearing, the singing and the living of God's Word and may God's name ever be hallowed in our lives.
Amen.