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Lord, Teach Us to Pray – Hallowed Be Your Name

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TEXT: Luke 11:1-4 (NRSV)

He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” He said to them, “When you pray, say:

Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.”

Something that you might notice when you read through Luke's Gospel in one sitting is that Jesus prayed a lot. In fact, I bet he'd agree with this little saying: when your day is hemmed with prayer, it's less likely to unravel. That was his experience. He knew the importance of prayer for his life, and he was dependent upon it. The disciples noticed the high value he placed on his time in prayer and how it helped, so they asked him to teach them to pray, and graciously he did. He taught them what we call the Lord's Prayer. We call it that because it comes from the Lord, but we could just as well call it the disciples' prayer. It was for the disciples to use. It's a framework, an outline for the disciples of Jesus to use in their conversations with God. Last week we looked at how we can approach God and address him, Jesus said, “When you pray, say father.” That's a very personal, intimate picture of God that Jesus is giving to us. And it means we can approach God in prayer as a child approaches a loving father.

So, today we ask, what's the first thing we talk to our Heavenly Father about? Well, according to Jesus, we talked to God about himself, his person. Jesus said, “When you pray, say hallowed, be thy name.” When Jesus speaks of God's name here, he is not just

talking about a title or a nametag. He is referring to the person of God himself, God's character. And we pray that God be hallowed. To hallow something is to treat it as holy. You revere, respect, honor, view it as sacred and worthy of awe and praise. You give special treatment. I'm reminded of the story of God speaking to Moses through a burning bush. God told Moses, "Don't come any closer, Moses. And by the way, remove your sandals for this is holy ground. It's special and sacred because of my presence. Treat it as that." The Jerusalem temple was called holy, wasn't it? It was referred to as the dwelling place of the Lord. A place of worship, prayer offerings, and God's word was proclaimed there. As the members of the Christian Church, we could also insert the word sanctuary in place of temple. The sanctuary is sacred, holy space that is set apart from the rest of the church building. It's where we worship God, feed on his word, bring our offerings, pray to him, baptize, receive communion, marry our young, and bury our dead. And it's different from other parts of the building. It's a holy place. We treat it as hallowed space. And Jesus teaches us that God's name, his person, is to be treated as holy and set apart as special by us. Our relationship with him is meant to be different than any other kind of relationship we might have. We were created to hallow him, revere him in every way – treat him as almighty because he holds the world in his hands, knowing that in whom we live and we move and we have our very being, therefore we live in awe of him. We hallow him, revering and respecting him above everything else. That's what God intended. I'm never to whittle him down to my size and treat him like the person next door or casually refer to him as "the man upstairs." He's God almighty, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, worthy of honor and praise and reverence from us.

When you think about it in this first petition, we have Jesus giving us a little balance to that opening address. Yes, he says, we can call God father, but we also keep in mind to revere God. And so, we asked that we may revere him in our lives. And that everyone would – that's our desire, that we would praise his holy name. And not profane him, which is just the opposite of hallowing. We think of profaning his name simply as an uttering the name of God thoughtlessly and carelessly and our cursing or as a conversational expression with others. And there's truth to that. This does profane him. And we need to be careful.

It's more than that, though. We profane him, not just in that particular way, but with our words and actions when we speak falsehoods and lies in his name about him and his desires for us, we profane his name. And when we disobey his word, we're

profaning in his name. When we're unloving towards others, when we treat people as less than us and ignore God's truth, that they too are created in his image and valued, that Jesus died for their salvation as well as our own. When we act like that or say things that devalue someone or do things, we're profaning God's name. Some terrible things are done in the name of God. And when that happens. God's name is profane, which, by the way, tends to drive people away from God, instead of attracting them to him, and that's tragic.

Martin Luther talks about this in his large catechism when he writes,

Just as it is a shame and disgrace to an earthly father to have a bad, unruly child who antagonizes him in word and deed with the result that, on his account, the father suffers scorn and reproach, so God is dishonored if we who are called by his name and enjoy his blessings, fail to teach and speak and live as God's godly and heavenly children with the result that he must hear us called not children of God, but children are the devil.

It's true that when we pray "hallowed be your name," we are petitioning God that the whole world revere and worship him and treat him as he deserves to be treated. And we're also praying personally that our daily living as individuals or as his community, the church, that our living might tally with the reality of who God is. And we're asking this help in that so that we may worship and revere him with all our thoughts, words and actions – not only on Sunday mornings, but every day, hallowing him as the maker, owner, redeemer and sustainer of our lives. In this first petition, we are asking that in the living of our lives as Christ followers, we might show absolute trust in God and submission of every area of our lives to him. That we be people who hallow him with our obedience to his word and glorify him in everything we say or do. We're asking his help in this.

In scriptures hallow and glorify are actually kindred concepts. Jesus prayed before obediently going to the cross, "Father, glorify your name." So, when we pray "hallowed be your name," it's kind of like that little praise song we sing in church sometimes. It says [singing] "In my life, Lord, be glorified, be glorified." And we're also asking that our Heavenly Father would enlighten us and empower us to perceive and reject every evil whim, satanic whim, in our lives and in the world around us, believing that he alone knows what's best for our lives. As children of God, we pray that we do life his way and not our way or Satan's way.

Finally, in this petition, we're also praying that we might influence others to hallow him and give him the reverence and respect and trust that he deserves. This petition reflects the child of God's lone-ing, that God would have top place in all people's lives, that all the peoples of the world would join us in trusting and praising and serving God. Now that can happen when we, as adopted sons and daughters, freely talk to others about what God has done and is doing in our lives, giving him the glory with humble, thankful hearts. It's all too easy for us to claim credit for our accomplishments and all that we have, and fail to point to the one who gave us the skill, the strength, the mind, and the provisions in the first place. Instead of bragging about themselves, God's adopted children are to brag about God in their conversations with others. And in doing that, we hallow his name.

It also involves pointing others to God's gracious saving actions on our behalf, through the life and death and resurrection of his son, Jesus Christ. That, you know, we were lost in our sin, but God has given us the gift of salvation in Christ eternal life through the actions of Jesus. That all who call upon Christ's name in faith shall be rescued forever. Well, telling others this good news is hallowing God's name and can bring others into his kingdom to join us in hallowing God. And we need his help in overcoming our fears about doing that. That's why we pray "Hallowed be your name" in me and through me as I talk about the good news of what you've done for all of us through Jesus. We hallow God's name when we love one another as his children and show love to our neighbor. And that doesn't come naturally, by the way – self-centeredness and self-preservation still lurks within our hearts. So again, we need God's help so that his name be hallowed in our loving of other people.

So, in this first petition, we're petitioning God to help us to hallow his name in all these ways. As you consider the whole narrative of scripture – I got to thinking about this – all people hallowing God has always been the goal all along. He created us to hallow his name. But sin ruined that, and humankind began to live to hallow our own names ourselves, be our own gods, in charge. And from Genesis 3 on, then, God is at work to save his sinful world that all nations, all people might hallow his name again. This truly is a big-picture goal of evangelism, when you think about it: that all people join us in hallowing God in worship and praise. That's the vision given the Apostle John at the end of scripture in Revelation, isn't it – all God's people are gathered around his throne following him, and what a glorious day that's going to be.

So truly, God is our father when we are followers of Jesus Christ, and we can come to him as children confidently approach a loving father. But let us also remember, as we turn to God in prayer, that our father is almighty and holy above all. And his will is that his name, his person, be hallowed by his children and all people with worship and praise and obedience to his holy word. Our Heavenly Father deserves nothing less than that.

So, when you pray, and I hope you have committed yourself to that daily practice at least once a day, may this petition always be included in your prayer: hallowed be your name, father, in my life in an all the world around me. Martin Luther, once again, in his large catechism, assures us with these words, "If you pray this petition wholeheartedly, you can be sure that God is pleased, for there is nothing he would rather hear than to have his glory and praise exalted above everything else and his word taught in purity and cherished and treasured."

Now we're at the end of our second class on the prayer Jesus gave us. So, I suggest we pray this petition right now before we go our separate ways. Let's pray. Father, be hallowed in our lives. Do whatever it takes to be holy and honored in our lives and take your rightful place on the throne. May you be exalted and magnified and honored in us in your church and in the world, not just later on, but now. We look forward to that great day when your people from every tribe, tongue, and nation joyfully shout, "Hallowed be your name, Lord." All glory and honor, power and might be to our God, forever and ever. We pray this with the mind of Christ. Amen.