

“Hallowed Be Thy Name”

by Rev. Jimmy Only

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out." Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!"

(Isaiah 6:1-8, NRSV)

By way of introduction, let's think for a moment about the words of Jesus known to us as the Lord's Prayer. Some refer to this prayer as the Model Prayer since Jesus offered it as a model, an ideal for his disciples to follow in deepening their own prayer lives. The New Testament contains two versions of this prayer. Jesus gives the shorter version in Luke (11:2-4) in response to the disciples' request, "Lord, teach us to pray." The longer version in Matthew (6:9-13), the one we will focus on throughout the next six weeks, comes from the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew's version contains an address to God, followed by six brief petitions.

A mere 58 words long, the influence of the Lord's Prayer on Christian spirituality and prayer is incalculable (John Purdy, *Lord Teach Us To Pray*, Pittsburgh, PA: The Kerygma Program, p. 1). Most churches around the world recite it in one form or another every time they gather to worship. It is sung at weddings and funerals, memorized by Sunday School children and Confirmants, and uttered in foxholes and emergency rooms. I have a cross-stitched version hanging on my office wall that my grandmother made for me as a birthday present when I turned 24. The importance of the Lord's Prayer to every generation of Christians makes this the perfect text for our Lenten Series.

The prayer begins with a communal word, "Our." Jesus was with his disciples so it makes sense that he would begin with the plural, but there is more to it than that. Saying "our" reminds us that we share God as our heavenly parent, and that none of us have any exclusive claim to God. When we say "our," we remind ourselves that we are *all* children of God, and that there's no such thing as the favorite child. The barriers we

construct—barriers of race, gender, religion, and nationality—signify nothing in God’s eyes. We are all God’s children. We are all created in God’s image. When we learn to appreciate our differences instead of using them to compete with one another, we find that we can learn from our sisters and brothers, and enrich one another’s lives.

In addition to our connection to one another, the word “our” also points to our connection to God, God’s eternal connection to each and every one of us. This connection shows itself plainly in the next word, “Father.” Jesus could have just as easily chosen the word, “Mother,” for the emphasis is on the parental relationship. The Aramaic word Jesus used for father was *Abba*, which can be translated “Daddy.” Some might think the term “Daddy” too familiar, too presumptuous for the Lord God Almighty. And yet this is the word Jesus chose, a word that connotes love, kindness, and tender affection. Who among us would feel comfortable bringing our innermost hurts and dreams to a distant, unapproachable God? But if we’re talking about our “Daddy,” the one who comforts us when we scrape our knees and helps get us out of the other scrapes we find ourselves in, then we are talking about a God we can relate to because this God constantly strives to relate to us. When Jesus called God “Daddy,” he spoke in terms of a loving Creator who knows us better than we know ourselves, who is with us every minute of every day, and who wants nothing but the best for us.

When Jesus used the phrase, “who art in heaven,” he was reminding his disciples that as familiar as we may be with God, that God’s realm and ours are two different places altogether: Heaven and earth. While God’s Spirit is present on earth, the fullness of God dwells only in Heaven.

As humans we have an inborn desire to reach beyond our grasp, to make contact with the dimension that eyes have never seen and ears have never heard. Think of some of our most familiar hymns: “Nearer, My God to Thee,” “Just a Closer Walk with Thee,” and “Near To the Heart of God.” All of these express our longing to be closer to God (Ibid. p. 8).

And what do we find when through worship, prayers, and other acts of discipleship we begin to feel closer to God? We learn what Isaiah learned in the passage Chase read a few moments ago, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of God’s glory” (6:3). The message Isaiah got from the heavenly creatures parallels what Jesus taught in the Lord’s Prayer when he said, “hallowed be thy name.” To hallow God’s name means to recognize that not only is God’s name holy, but God’s very essence is holiness.

The origin of the word “holy” means “separation” or “set aside,” similar to the word “consecration.” When we say that God is holy we acknowledge that we are not God’s equal, that God’s very essence of pure love is incomprehensible to us, and that God’s ability to create this universe and the likes of us truly boggles the mind. God is above and beyond us, which is why the ball was in God’s court when it came to having a relationship with humanity. God took the initiative with Abraham and Sara to establish the covenant. God took the initiative with Moses through the burning bush to bring the children of Israel out of Egyptian slavery. God took the initiative with humanity 2,000

years ago in the person of Jesus to plunge headlong into our earthly existence and experience first-hand what it means to be human.

Recall that on Good Friday when Jesus died, the veil that separated the Holy of Holies in the Temple from the rest of the inner courts was torn apart. Likewise, Jesus tore apart the wall of separation between God and humanity in a unique and permanent fashion. No longer would humans need a high priest to offer sacrifices to some distant God. Instead, Jesus serves as our high priest through whom we have an eternal connection to God.

Although this has never been emphasized in the Congregational tradition, many Christians give up something for Lent. Perhaps what we need to give up is not chocolate or television, not that this wouldn't do us some good, but the notion that God is inaccessible. Perhaps we need to remember that while God is holy and shrouded in mystery, we can still approach God and grow in God's grace. We live by faith, but we also live with assurances. The assurance that God knew us before we ever knew God. The assurance that God loved us before we ever loved God. And the assurance that God has been reaching out to us in countless ways for countless years waiting for only one answer, "yes." May we all say "yes" to God throughout this Lenten season, and throughout our lives. AMEN.

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