

Pastor Lew Upchurch
Lent-Wednesday Night
March 5, 2014

"Hallowed Be Thy Name"

H-a-l-l-o-w-e-d.\ 'ha-(.)lōd, or in the Lord's Prayer often pronounced 'ha-lə-wəd\. It means sacred, revered, or highly respected. But which ever way you pronounce it, it's not a word that we hear that much outside of the Lord's Prayer, is it? Sure, there are those Greenbay Packer fans who may refer to Lambeau Field as "hallowed ground" or those Duke fans who make the same claim about Cameron Indoor Stadium. Maybe you use that word to describe your favorite team's stadium (unless, of course you are a Lion's fan). But those descriptions are more about reverence for the team than a description of something sacred- at least I hope that's the case! Of course, the word "hallowed" is still used in other contexts. The hallowed battlefields of Gettysbury or Normandy come to mind as stark reminders of the tremendous sacrifice of life that occurred during war. But even with these few examples, the word "hallowed" is not one we hear that much anymore.

Dr. Martin Luther writing in his Large Catechism on the first petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Hallowed be thy name," which is our focus tonight as we continue our Lenten sermon series on The Lord's Prayer and Christ's Passion, wrote that "the word hallowed is rather obscure language." That's right, the guy writing in the early 1500's considered the word "hallowed" obscure. Based on these comments, it's amazing that hundreds of years later, we even use the word at all!

But as he always seemed to do so well in his writings, Martin Luther quickly put the phrase into proper perspective. He goes on to say that a better way to say and even try and understand the petition "hallowed be thy name" is this way. "Heavenly Father, grant that your name alone

may be holy." Let me say that again, "Heavenly Father, grant that your name alone may be holy."

Dr. Luther then goes on to ask the question, "what is it to pray that his name may become holy?" "Is it not already holy?" The answer of course is yes, in its essence, God's name is always holy but our use of it so much of the time is what's not holy.

That's one of the reasons I love reading Luther's writings. He doesn't shy away from getting straight to the point and this is a great example. God's name is always holy, but we are the ones who dishonor it.

These are tough words but they are also true words for so many of us aren't they? God is our Father, we are his children. We are to pray that we keep his name holy in our lives, which means we behave like good children should. Our lives should reflect his honor and praise for us not our self-centered desires and shameful behavior. This is a hard reality, I admit. But we must face what God desires from us.

Maybe instead of giving up something during these solemn weeks of Lent, we should instead take this time to examine ourselves and honestly evaluate how well we are keeping God's name holy in our lives. And it starts by asking ourselves this question. Is what I'm doing or is what I am saying honoring God's name?

Are the websites we are visiting honoring God's name? Are the messages we reading or sending on social media honoring God's name? Is the way we are talking to our spouses, our parents, our friends, our elders, or even complete strangers honoring God's name? Is the way people see us living our lives, managing our money, spending our time honoring God's name? Are we really asking God that his name alone may be holy in our lives?

And for we Lutherans, this may be harder than it sounds. At the core of our very understanding of relationship with God is that we are justified by God's grace through our faith right? Not by the things that we do. True enough. Salvation is not about what we do, it is about

the faith we have in what God did for us in Christ. And as hard as we try, we still fail but through confessing our sins and asking for his mercy with repentant hearts, even though we fail, God forgives us. That's all true. But in no way does that give us license to sin. In no way does God's grace remove us from following his laws.

Luther writes that we "profane" the name of God when we use his name to "dress up our lies to make them acceptable." This is the worst dishonor of the divine name, he says and I agree. When we start rationalizing our own sin somehow thinking that in our particular case, God gives us some kind of free pass, we are not keeping God's name holy.

These aren't Martin Luther's ideas by the way, this is God's Word. Remember the 2nd Commandment? Exodus Chapter 20:7; "You shall not take the name of The Lord your God in vain, for the The Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. We are not to misuse the name of The Lord by deceiving it. We are not to insert the Lord's name into our definition of happiness. We are not to use God's name to advance our own agendas but we are to call upon his name in every trouble; we are to praise his name and give him thanks.

And as I've already said, we will have those days when we fail miserably to keep his name holy. God knows that. He doesn't want that from us but he knows that we will all experience, some worse than others, times when we act as if his name means nothing at all.

This is nothing new for God. Just look at how he was ridiculed, mocked, beaten, and accused in front of the council in our Gospel reading from Luke. Tell us if you are the Christ, they said. But Jesus knowing their hearts said to them, "if I tell you, you will not believe and if I ask you, you will not answer."

My friends, God did not sacrifice himself for us to act like the elders, the chief priests and scribes that day. But that's just what we do when we fail to pray that God's name be kept holy in our lives. God wants us to acknowledge who he is; the one who came into his once perfect world that we messed up and instead of destroying us; he saved us. How much more incentive to do we need to keep his name holy in our lives?

For some, it is apparent that God's name is Holy but for many others, not so much. Yet even those who have failed to pray that his name alone be kept holy, even those baptized into his name who fail to answer who he is, God is there. We can leave him; we can ignore him and keep on living for ourselves but he will never leave us, his children. The author of Psalm 139 writes, "you O Lord have searched me and known me. You discern my thoughts from afar. You are acquainted with all my ways. Where shall I flee from your presence?" That's the thing, we can't flee from him; he is always there for us and his desire for us is that our lives reflect his holy name. And in order for all of us to reflect his holy name we must pray with repentant hearts. Not just a one time, "God, I'm sorry for the times your name has not been kept holy in my life," but a daily repentance trusting that he hears our prayer and gives us his peace.

Growing up, my father owned a cabinet shop and as I got older was able to spend summers there working. One of those employees I worked with one summer was named Willie. Willie worked as an installer. He was a pleasant man. He always treated me with respect when I was sent out to help him on a job. I never got the impression he was only being nice because my father signed his paycheck because he complemented me when my work was to his liking but corrected me when it wasn't. We spent a lot of time together that summer traveling from job to job, which gave us the opportunity to get to know each other well.

One day, Willie shared with me that his oldest son was in prison for being an accessory to murder. This was a shock to me. I remember thinking, perhaps for the first time that there were actually bad people in the world. I didn't ask a lot of questions but I didn't have to because Willie shared with me something I will never forget. He said he would always love his son. He would never desert him. He would never accept the crime his son committed but he would never stop loving him.

And the same is true with our God. He will always love his children. But the difference is God accepted the crime for which his Son was accused. And most importantly he accepted the punishment, sacrifice of his own life, which means undeserved forgiveness for you and me. That is why we pray that his name alone be holy and that our lives honor him. Hallowed Be Thy Name. **Amen.**

