

The Lord's Prayer: Our Unity

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Exodus 3:1-5, 7-8a, 13-15

Revelation 4: 1-4, 8, 11

Hallowed Be Thy Name

A reading from the vision of John in Revelation, chapter 4:



After this I looked, and there in heaven a door stood open! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." At once I was in the spirit, and there in heaven stood a throne, with one seated on the throne! And the one seated there looks like jasper and carnelian, and around the throne is a rainbow that looks like an emerald.

Around the throne are twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones are twenty-four elders, dressed in white robes, with golden crowns on their heads. Coming from the throne are flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and in front of the throne burn seven flaming torches, which are the seven spirits of God; and in front of the throne there is something like a sea of glass, like crystal.

Day and night without ceasing they sing,

*"Holy, holy, holy,
the Lord God the Almighty,
who was and is and is to come." ...
"You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they existed and were created."*

The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

My family is still laughing about the time I walked into the lamppost in Ouray, Colorado. Ouray is a little town in the San Juan Mountains, surrounded by gorgeous mountain peaks. Looking at the Rockies and not at all looking where I was going, I smacked into an ill-placed lamppost, and fell backwards onto my ... while my husband and 2 daughters doubled over laughing. It was seriously funny. That trip was full of moments like that. I'm glad it happened before everyone had phones and iPads. My kids saw all of it – including my epic fall, and the Grand Canyon, The Painted Desert, Pike's Peak, the Anasazi Petroglyphs, Mesa Verde, and Sedona.

Today, we don't look out the window as much. Instead we keep our faces planted in our devices, looking at videos of the thing, rather than the thing itself.

“This is awesome!” I kept saying, and it was true. The Grand Canyon *is* amazing...breathtaking. I was in line at Subway the other day. Two guys in front of me were watching the sandwich artist make their footlongs. One of them exclaimed: “This sandwich is going to be awesome!” And I wondered: Is that possible? Can a sandwich fill you with wonder and awe? I guess it depends on how hungry you are!

I wish people came to worship that way. Hungry, mouth-watering, aching for an experience of God. “Take off your shoes, Moses, you are standing on holy ground.” We all are...on holy ground, though you may not know it.

But most of the time, that’s not how we come. Instead, we walk into the sanctuary thinking, “Yeah, I’ve seen all this before.” We’re not expecting much to happen. We have grown too accustomed to God’s glory. Author Annie Dillard, who grew up Presbyterian wondered:

“Why do people in church seem like cheerful ... tourists on a packaged tour of the Absolute? ... Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we blithely invoke? ... The churches are [like] children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness ... we should all be wearing crash helmets ... they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake someday ... or the waking god may draw us to where we can never return.”ⁱ

She’s talking about reverence, awe, the holy-otherness of God whose name is hallowed. It’s about reverence for God and all that God has made. We ask for it, every time we say the Lord’s Prayer, each time we pray, “*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.*”

Why do we say that? The simple answer is that it’s how Jesus taught us to pray. The lector read from Exodus about God’s answer to Moses’ question about God’s name. “Say, I AM sent you.” Yahweh, in Hebrew. God’s name means that God is and was and will always be. Jesus taught us to honor and glorify God’s name. “*Pray this way,*” he said, “*Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.*” That one phrase summarizes the first three of the 10 Commandments:

1. Worship only God.
2. Don’t make a false god out of anything or anyone.
3. Honor God’s name.

That’s three out of 10, *resumido* (ray-suh-me’-duh).

So what does that look like? How do we hallow God’s name? Hallow is not a word you hear much, unless you’re into Harry Potter. In Harry Potter the *Deadly Hallows* are objects, not actions, objects that, taken together give their owner mastery over death. That’s an interesting connection. Hallow in the Bible means something simpler. It means to make holy, honor, revere, or set aside for a sacred purpose.

Bill Carl, my beloved seminary professor, pointed out that it’s not a question of whether God’s name will be holy. That’s a given – everything about God is holy. The question, Bill said, is

whether God's name will be made holy in us, and whether through us, the world will be able to see the holiness of God in us. Believers either make God's holiness visible in our words and actions – or we don't.

It might make more sense if I say what hallowing God's name is not. Hallowing God's name is not co-opting God's name for a particular bias or prejudice or political or economic agenda. I recently read David Blight's new biography of Frederick Douglass. You know that he escaped from slavery in Talbot County, on the Eastern Shore. Blight tells how, when Douglass was a slave, preachers would come and speak to the slaves, telling them that they must –in God's name, submit to slavery and obey their masters. "Slavery is in the Bible, therefore it is God's will," they said. Many people believed it.

Last weekend I was in Tampa officiating at the wedding of two precious friends who are in their 20's. The wedding was not in a church, but in an historic theater that's been converted into an event venue. When the service was over, three young women came over. "We're glad you mentioned God's name in the ceremony," one of them said brightly, "I know a lot of people don't like that, but we do." I was shocked. I didn't just mention God's name, the service was all about God – Joe and Maddy dedicating their marriage to God and asking God's blessings on it. "Why do you think some people don't want God's name mentioned?" I asked, and they looked at me as if to say "Where have you been?" One of them spoke up, and I'll never forget what she said, "I think it's because so many people use God's name to hurt others, or to tell us (she pointed to the other women) that we are inferior, or to shame our gay friends."

Here's what God's name is not – God's name is not a rubber stamp that we can use to hallow our personal opinions. God's name is sacred and powerful, and we need to respect it as holy and never, never abuse it. Jesus taught us to pray that God's name would be continually made more and more holy in us. So how do we do that? There are three ways: words, worship and work.

First, we hallow God – in our words – the way we speak to God and of God, not avoiding God's name, but speaking God's name with gratitude and glory, and hallowing God in the way we treat each other. I love what Peter Marty, the editor of Christian Century magazine said about this. He wrote:

"Once words leave my tongue, they're gone. There's no retrieving them. Either they form people into creative and faithful beings or they fall flat ... or worse, they take down."ⁱⁱ

We need to hallow God with our words. We also need to hallow God's name in our worship. That's what the elders are doing in John's vision from Revelation that I read just a minute ago. They're singing "Holy, holy, holy, Lord, God Almighty." Now I know that some of you don't like to sing. I know this because when the rest of us are singing, you have your arms crossed and are frowning. You're looking at me like, "You can't make me do that." And I can't. But I can tell you the truth: This is God's commandment, that you honor and sanctify and bless God's name, in the assembly of God's people.

Jesus taught us to hallow God with our words, and our worship, and finally, we need to hallow God's name in our work. Paul wrote:

*And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*ⁱⁱⁱ

Do everything to the glory of God's name. If you're studying calculus, study it to the glory of God. If you're cleaning a bathroom, clean it to the glory of God. If you are teaching a class, or driving a bus, trying a case, teach, drive and try it to the glory of God. If you can't do it to the glory of God, then don't do it at all.

Sometimes we think of missions as holy work: teaching Sunday school, building Habitat houses, or serving at Free Lunch. But God's glory doesn't stop there. God's glory is everywhere! And when we hallow God's name in our words and worship and work then we recognize the holiness of God in everyone – and a sandwich can be as awesome as a mountain range, and all is gratitude.

There's a lot of coarseness, and disrespect, a lot of depression and anger. It's because people have forgotten to hallow God's name: word, worship, work. I think Bono got it right when he wrote:

“Take these shoes ...
And make them fit.
Take this shirt ...
And make it clean.
Take this soul
Stranded in some skin and bones
Take this soul and make it sing. ...

Take these hands
Teach them what to carry
Take these hands
Don't make a fist, no

Take this mouth
So quick to criticize
Take this mouth
Give it a kiss

Take this heart
Take this heart
Take this heart
And make it break.

Yahweh, Yahweh!”^{iv}

ⁱ Annie Dillard, *Teaching a Stone to Talk: Expeditions and Encounters*, Harper and Row, 1982m 40-41

ⁱⁱ Peter Marty, “Words We Can't Take Back” *Christian Century*, January 31, 2018

ⁱⁱⁱ Colossians 3:17

^{iv} Bono and The Edge, “Yahweh” *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb*, 2004