



WESTLAKE HILLS
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

"Hallowing God's Name"

Lord, Teach Us How to Pray:

A Sermon Series on the Lord's Prayer

Psalm 29:1-11

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We are continuing our sermon series on "**Lord, Teach Us How to Pray**" and I must confess over these past weeks and months I've learned something about prayer as the Friesens have experienced a few medical events. It is interesting how our life's circumstances color how we interpret and perceive things around us. This morning at the 8:15 service, Jim Bankhead was offering a prayer and he was talking about obstacles to our relationship with God. He spoke of channels being blocked and all I could think of was arteries being blocked with plaque.

Well, last week we heard from Pastor Peter Barnes about the opening praise of the Lord's Prayer, "Our Father" and we are reminded of the amazing truth that Jesus taught us to call God our Abba Father and so we are reminded of the intimacy and the familiarity of the God of the universe and what He wants us to have in relationship with Him.

Well today's phrase, "Hallowed by Thy Name" is not quite so familiar. In fact, it is 15th century English. I heard a story of a young boy who was saying his prayers and his dad with him as he was tucking him in for the night. After he prayed, the father asked his son, "Why do you call God, Harold?" The boy said, "Well, that is what we pray in church, 'Our Father who art in heaven, Harold be thy name.'" Well, hopefully, we are not calling God, Harold, but that phrase 'hallowed' can be confusing and it can be confusing to us how to we hallow God's name. In fact, something that gets lost in translation is that really this phrase, hallowed be thy name is not a declaration of God's holiness, it is actually the first of the seven imperatives or requests that follow. A better reading might be, may your name be honored and revered. For to hallow God's name is not simply to protect God's name from being used carelessly, it really means to honor and revere God himself.

That is what we do here on Sunday mornings, that is why we gather for worship and sing praise songs and hymns like, "O Day of Radiant Gladness" and "Praise my Soul the King of Heaven." We are here to honor and revere the name of God. The question I want to ask this morning is what happens when we leave the sanctuary? What happens tomorrow? What happens next week? How can we cultivate that spirit of reverence in our day-to-day lives? This is the question I want us to address this morning.

But first, let us pray.

Our Father, we do come together as a family of faith, as your children. Thankful for the gift of life. Thankful for this community of faith. Thankful for your Word and the chance to come together to grow in the grace and knowledge of the living God. We come thankful too for your Holy Spirit and we pray for your Holy Spirit to speak to each of us this morning that these words would not simply be words, but they would be truths that You impart on our hearts and ways that we leave this place with a desire to be men

and women who do hallow Your name. So, come Holy Spirit and be our teacher. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

A few years ago Paul and I had the opportunity to travel to California. It was a special weekend at Fuller. I was able to participate in the commencement exercises and then we drove up Highway 1 to Monterey and went over to Salinas to visit the Steinbeck Museum and then we went down Highway 5 and over to Sequoia National Park. The California coast is absolutely spectacular, but nothing prepared me for the Sequoias. I was struck speechless by the size and grandeur of these two and three thousand year old trees, some up to 320' tall - that is the height of the Chase Bank Tower downtown - some with trunks from 4-7 feet in diameter. A sense of timeliness and eternity pervade that place. I found myself resonating with the words of one National parks employee who wrote, "Walking among the Sequoias, I felt like a dwarf in the presence of antiquated monarchs. They prompt me to consider the brevity of human life and the folly of believing that people have dominion over wild things. How can I question the sovereignty of God when I'm standing in a gallery of some of His finest works. The Creator's mastery of forms, function, endurance and beauty is evident everywhere."

Well, Psalm 29 doesn't specifically mention the Sequoias, but the Psalmist does speak of the cedars of Lebanon, many of which grew to a height of 120' with trunks approaching 9' in diameter. Another Psalm, Psalm 19, says the heavens declare the glory of God, the sky proclaim the works of his hands. More often than not, when I take the time to really see, hear and touch the created world around me, I find myself drawn into a place of worship. The beauty, complexity and the integration of life happening all around feels me with wonder. I am reminded of the transcended dimension of my earthly existence and of how much I don't understand. God is so much more wonderful and so much more powerful and so much more holy than anything or anyone I could image.

C. S. Lewis believed that our experiences of pleasure are like beams or shafts of light declaring the glory of God and providing us with the opportunity to make ever pleasure into a channel of adoration. Not simply by giving thanks – though giving thanks is good – but as a means to experience the wonder and awe of a God who has created such pleasures. The type of prayers of often called adoration express a spontaneous desire of the human heart to worship, honor, magnify and bless God. Our prayers in such moments become self forgetful – we cease asking God for something and instead are enveloped in a spirit of seeing and praising His majesty, power and goodness.

Becoming a people who "hallow God's name" means becoming a people who are filled with awe and wonder, who see the glory of God visible in this world and who long for others to see and acknowledge that glory. Sadly, it seems that in our modern world our capacity for wonder and adoration have been eroded. In this book, *Your God is Too Safe*, Mark Buchanan suggests that technology while doing so much to empower us, has also done real damage and diminished our capacity for wonder and imagination. Our world has shifted so now so much of life seems to be experienced indirectly.

Years ago, E. B. White spoke of this shift. He wrote in an article in the New Yorker saying, "Last night there was a total eclipse of the moon and the weather conditions were such that most people could have watched it from their front lawns, but instead most people watched it on television." Progress at times seems to dull our capacity for wonder. We become consumed by analysis and endless improvements so that we can find solutions and bring the world under man's control.

We need more “awe in our lives” – more of those Holy moments when the dignity of all things and the recognition that things are what are, but also stand, however, remotely for something supreme. We need that sense of transcendence that points us to the mystery beyond and enables us to perceive in the world the footprints of God.

To ask that God’s name be hallowed and revered is to ask that God would be revealed for all that God is. These words also serve to warn us not to misrepresent God or use God’s name as a kind of weapon to defend ourselves or as a sort of magic to get what we want.

God is so much bigger, greater, and more wonderful that we can imagine. Holy places and holy moments startle us out of our stupor fueling our desire to live in the knowledge of God every moment and every place – reminding us that every moment and every place is pregnant with God’s presence.

What keeps us from living in holy wonder and boundless adoration? The truth is God is present in our midst; we’re the ones who seem to wander off. Our biggest obstacle is our own inattention. We are so caught up in the busy-ness of life that we miss the overtures of Divine love. There are so many demands – demands of home and family, school & work and demands of church – that conspire to make life a blur. But the cost is great – for we cannot adore what we do not see and more often than not we cannot see if we do not take the time to pay attention.

Becoming a people who pay attention and who live lives marked by adoration does not come automatically. We can’t all move to California to the Sequoias. We can’t all live in the mountains or on the coast. We need to cultivate that wonder and adoration right where we are – in the midst of the demands and frantic pace of ordinary life.

When we think of hallowing God’s name and praying prayers of adoration, often times we think we need to summon up everything we believe about the greatness of God and start naming God’s divine attributes. His omnipotence, His omniscience and His omnipresence, His immutability, His benevolence, His holiness and His righteous and then His divine works of creation and redemption and preservation and providence. But it turns out that centering on the grand and the cosmic is not the best way to learn adoration, at least at first. It wears us out and defeats us to start in this way. No, it is better to start more simply. We learn about the goodness of God, not by contemplating the cosmos but by paying attention to the little creatures that creep upon the earth – creatures like lizards and ants, caterpillars and butterflies. Not to study or analyze, but just to watch and enjoy them. Stop long enough to watch a bird in flight or a squirrel scampering up a tree. When we listen to the sound of the wind or watch the leaves on the trees. When we pay attention we begin to experience those shafts of glory from which thanksgiving, praise and adoration of God naturally flow.

When we attend to the holy all around us we begin to catch glimpses of the intersection of our human existence and our physical world with that which is timeless and eternal. We become filled with awe at being alive and the wonder of inhabiting our universe.

But, we need time – time to notice, time to wonder and time to reflect. We need to make margins in our lives so that we aren’t always rushing from one event to the next. For the truth is without margin, without making spaces that recognize our own limits and need for rest and reflection it is impossible to foster that holy awareness that reminds us of who God is and that fills our lives with holy places and holy

moments. Without margins, we are either too busy or too tired to taste & touch, see & smell and be reminded that God is good. Without margins, it is difficult for us to hallow God's name.

I find it interesting that two of the most commonly ignored of the Ten Commandments are listed side by side. The 3rd commandment forbidding the misuse of God's name and the 4th commandment to remember the Sabbath. I wonder if there is a connection.

Abraham Heschel was a Polish-born American rabbi considered one of the leading Jewish theologians of the 20th century. Several years before he died in 1972, he suffered a near fatal heart attack from which he never fully recovered. When interviewed by a fellow rabbi and friend, Heschel described his near death experience. He said, "When I regained consciousness, my first feelings were not of despair or anger. I felt only gratitude to God for my life, for every moment I had lived. I was ready to depart and thought take me O Lord, I have seen so many miracles in my lifetime." Then Heschel paused, exhausted by the effort and he said, "That is what I meant when I wrote in my book, 'I did not ask God for success; I asked God for wonder and God gave it to me.'"

In our hectic world in which we have distanced ourselves from the rhythms of life, we've also lost our capacity for wonder, awe and adoration. In the process, our ability to "hallow God's name" has become a checklist of do's and don'ts or hastily recited theological affirmations that don't sink deeply into our psyche. We live in a culture in which mystery and wonder have become suspect. But, without a respect for the mystery who is God, our worship becomes anemic and we fail to honor His name.

What stirs you to reverence and honor God. Where have you experienced those holy places and those holy moments? To hallow God's name is to recognize that God is so much bigger than any boxes or concepts or agendas or theologies we can create or even imagine. To hallow God's name is to remember that God is present in our midst.

The God we worship – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – is a holy mystery. His voice thunders over the waters and He strikes with flashes of lightning. He is the Lord – enthroned as King forever. Amazingly though, this same God, whose name is to be revered and honored, this God who is so far beyond our understanding and even beyond our imagination – this God became one of us, sending us His Son to teach us the way, the truth and the life. This Son taught us to come to our Father in prayer, not as a distant and fearful deity, but as our Abba. The God who sits enthroned above is a God of love and compassion, a God who gives strength and peace, Shalom, to his people.

Brothers and sisters, let us take the time to attend to God's presence all around us. Let us pay attention to those shafts of glory, listening and watching, hearing and seeing, wondering at the One who creates and sustains our universe. Let us honor and revere His Holy Name.

Let us pray.

Holy God. A God who invites to come to Him as our Father. We pray that you would help each of us to learn how to honor and reverence You. I pray Lord that you would open our hearts and minds, open our ears and eyes to see and hear and taste and touch. To experience those shafts of glory that will cause us to praise your Holy Name and wonder at the One who created this universe. Lord, I pray that you would help us to create margins in our lives that we would take time to experience the world around us. That we would be people who adore You. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.