

PENTECOST 3 - JUNE 9 2024
Luke 11:1-10 - The Holiness

Last week we introduced the Lord's Prayer. We looked at both Matthew's and Luke's version. However, although there are countless versions of the prayer, both recited and sung in numerous languages, surprisingly none of these versions are exact copies of what we find in our Bible. There is no "correct" version. Remember, Jesus said, "Pray like this" - not "Pray this."

Last week our focus was on the word "Father." We looked at the prayer as a creed to be confessed openly by living it rather something to simply recite and heap up with "empty phrases," that Jesus so often criticized. If your recall from last week, the prayer identified the Twelve as followers of the One who originated the prayer, a common practice for rabbis or teachers, to give their disciples an identifying prayer. This served as an abridged confessional statement on which they could depend when needs arose. Although Jesus intended this prayer for praying as a guide, it was also meant to be used as a faith statement long before more detailed confessions and creeds evolved. Prayer is not so much language about God, as it is speaking to God. To pray is to risk speaking to a God who is unseen and yet real. To pray is to recognize that God is different from us.

The first petition is that God's name might be holy. The focus remains on God's identity and action. According to Ezekiel, God would make his name holy by gathering people together, cleansing them from sin, and giving them a new spirit. By such holy actions, God's "name" or identity is made known in the world.

By keeping God's name holy, we recognize God as the source of holiness and express a desire to approach God with the joyful reverence

of love. Mary says something similar at the beginning of her poetic praise in the Magnificat - "...for he the Mighty One is holy, and he has done great things for me." The Greek word translated "hallowed" is elsewhere translated "holy" or "sanctified." God makes us holy with the gift of the Holy Spirit, and when we receive that gift, we find in ourselves the beginning of the answer to this petition, the beauty of holiness at work in our lives in a way that makes God feel at home.

We witness a brilliant display of the work of the Spirit in the first chapters of Luke: the announcement and birth of John the Baptist, the Birth of Jesus foretold, Mary visiting Elizabeth, the Magnificat, the birth of Jesus. We can only imagine what this breadth of holiness might create in us: joy, wisdom, impossible newness, life. Embracing the gift of the Spirit in our lives hallows or makes holy, God's name, drawing attention for us and those around us to the fullness of God's holiness present in the created world.

The prayer Jesus teaches in Luke follows the pattern of the commandment to love God with heart, soul, strength and mind and our neighbours as ourselves. Only after the prayer is grounded in God's person and reign do we move to requests that reflect our personal needs, our relationships with our neighbours, and the struggles of our own souls.

The important thing to remember is our connection to God is relational. The Father God, necessitates this relationship. God the Father is good and faithful, giving us more than we can imagine. The Lord's Prayer is a continuation of the psalms which address the relationship with God. The laments are not complaints, but prayers that address God and praise him.

Consider the engineered lanes of a freeway or highway. They are simple, but not simplistic. Hidden beneath the ribbons of concrete lie the details of engineering, of construction, of skill and labour. And, just as freeways require minute engineering detail, so does prayer. For instance: “May your name be kept holy,” or “hallowed be your name” - gentle words, that contain an amazing and awesome array of implications that we need to follow up on and examine. These will help us to appreciate their strength and effectiveness in supporting us in our travel through life. “May your name be kept holy”: that’s our freeway now, the freeway of Christian life.

As we study the construction of the “road of life,” we begin with the obvious. In this brief passage from the Lord’s Prayer, we speak of keeping a name holy. It’s a specific name. It’s the name of God. We address Him as “Father” in this prayer, but that title is mostly a description of his relationship with us.

The name of God which was revealed in the Old Testament is *Yahweh*, a genderless name - not male, not female. This was common in the use of names or titles for God. To the Jews that name was so holy that they dared not speak it: it could not even be whispered. As they read the Scriptures, they would use another name for God: *Adonai* in Hebrew, or *Kyrios* in Greek, meaning Lord. That, too was a title rather than the intimate personal name of God. Human lips, they believed, were imperfect, therefore, they must never utter the name of the one who is perfect. Instead, they employed a title, a reverent and honourable title.

Jesus invites us to make Holy his name because to do so is to honour God himself. For Middle Easterners, one’s name is more than one’s bond; it is the person himself. As one theologian explained, “The name of God stands for the whole being of God. To know his name is to know

his character, his personality, his temperament, his love, his mercy, his power.”

Therefore, we make holy, the *person* of God. That is, we sanctify God. Instead of making God common, we revere him as he is; holy, even without our making him or his name holy. Yet, when we pray this petition, we also confess that we believe he is so holy that we shall not be among those who demean him.

As we study the design of this highway of the Christian life, the structural steel is God’s name. It spans the murky waters of uncertainty beneath and the quagmire of doubt nearby.

The second aspect of this freeway is the concrete paving. The words, “May your name be kept holy” are not merely an idle exclamation, they are a petition. We are *praying* that God’s name be kept holy. The words are an appeal that God be sanctified, not only by those who believe in him, but also by those who do not. This immense petition flows like a ribbon of ready-mix concrete from the Lord’s Prayer into the girders and framework of the Christian life.

This ribbon links every Christian with one another. It binds us to the world in which we live - for if this planet is abused, its riches squandered, its morality abandoned, and the whole place fouled to the point of helplessness, the creator of this universe is not made holy. Not at all. To make his name holy means to care for what is his.

Our confession of this creedal prayer is a renewing of our pact to be stewards of the earth. As we uphold the designer and builder of this universe, so we accept the role of steward, manager, in caring for it.

This petition, is stated as a command, rather than a plea. A literal rendering of the Greek would read, "Cause your name to be kept holy." In short, we are asking God for God's active action in sanctifying his name in this world. We are earnestly appealing that the One who has the authority and the power remind us that God truly is God.

Holiness or sacredness is emphasized, and not just the name Holiness is relational. Where do people see the sacred? Holy or sacred sets us apart. Sacred moments are where one encounters God. You have probably heard people speak of a "God Moment" or a "God thing" of some sort. This the place where we encounter the sacred. Worship is a sacred space, because that is where we encounter and acknowledge who God is for people. It is where we communicate with God, it's a sacred time and space. In our proclamation, we experience a sacred moment where we recognize our relationship with the holy in our praying and singing.

Sweden's King Charles XII, who battled Peter the Great across much of Eastern Europe, was not a popular man in his homeland. The Swedes had lost vast colonies and countless lives as well as great riches because of the aspirations of their monarch. Yet, he was a daring man. One time, the king decided to visit Karlstad, a city in the middle of the kingdom, without fanfare. He rode alone and arrived on a Sunday as the people were in church. Dishevelled and dirty from his exhausting ride, he nevertheless entered the packed church to worship.

There were no seats left, so he just leaned against a wall unnoticed to hear the sermon already in progress. An old man, perhaps a soldier who had served under Charles XII, recognized him immediately. The old man stood erect and respectful. Others, hearing it whispered, arose also, so that before long the whole church was standing in honour of their king.

Although these people had cursed the king many times for their enormous losses in human life and national wealth, when they saw him, “they were immediately under his dominion.”

Some Christians act as if they have never seen their king. Their faith is so weak that one wonders how often they ignore him in their daily walk. But when he appears on the Last Day and forgives their weakness, will they not also stand tall and honour him then? If so, their gelatinous spiritual spines will become like steel and concrete.

If God’s name is the structural steel of this phrase in Jesus’ prayer, and if its petitionary nature is the concrete that paves this freeway, then praise can be understood as the lane markings, the directional signs, the lights, and the landscape. Whatever else Jesus intended this prayer to be, and to do for the Twelve, it was proposed to be a means to give God glory.

Long before the towers and steeples of Gothic cathedrals scratched the sky and jewel-toned windows filled their buttressed walls with sparkling light, humankind was keeping God holy. In simple songs and complex cantatas, in the thunderous sounds of organ pipes, and the haunting sound of woodwinds, in the rich harmony of strings and the blare of brass, in solo voice and massive choirs, people have kept God holy with music, glorying in his love; in pen and ink, in oil and watercolour, in magnificent murals and spectacular mosaics.

The Church of the Pater Noster on Jerusalem’s Mount of Olives is decorated with colourful tiles that portray the Lord’s Prayer in 80 different languages, some well-known, others obscure. These 80 depictions tacitly proclaim that people everywhere are confessing themselves to be disciples of Jesus. Pilgrims from around the world seek out their

language and have their picture taken, standing, before this declarative prayer. The photos announce not only the visitors' nationality, but also their affirmation of the meaning behind the words. They confess God whom Jesus addressed in the prayer, the heavenly Father, the one whose name is to be hallowed.

Even in the tiny illuminated letters on handwritten books, artists have added their praise of God who humbles humanity with the gentle beauty of a wild flower as well as the greater gift of the Gospel. In marble and ironwood, in oratory poetry, God has been proclaimed and God has been hallowed. Yet, life itself glorifies God. "May your name be kept holy," or "hallowed be your name" we pray, not so that monuments may be built, but that lives may radiate a sanctity that honours the Triune God in word and deed.

The highway of life is well-marked when it has the signs of praise in ready evidence, when despite the ills of life, people see the greater gift of God's healing and sing to his honour. Instead of reeling in the plague of sin, they revel in the joy of Jesus.

How is the freeway of your life marked? With the signs of praise and the stripping of adoration? Is it lighted with the bright globes of Christian love? That's what it means to not only recite, "May your name be kept holy," but to act it out in life.

Raoul Wallenberg, was only the second person to be made an honorary American. Educated in the U.S., he was the heroic Swedish diplomat whom President Roosevelt and King Gustav V sent to Hungary to rescue the remaining Jews in the last days of WWII. Among those rescued were a congressman and his wife.

In 1984, while standing on Wallenberg Street in Budapest, a woman came up to an American visitor and said in a heavy accent, “You Svedish?” “No. American.” “Wallenberg,” she said, pointing to the memorial marker on the corner of an apartment house there. “Wallenberg a good man. He helped me.” The visitor was astonished to meet one of those who had survived the Holocaust. Wallenberg had kept God’s name holy in such a way that many still remember what this Christian did for Jews. He left his mark of praise of God upon everyone he rescued. He let light shine in the darkness. He marked the way to freedom for others.

Are the signs of your praise lining your freeway of life? You many not be able to rescue 120,000 people, but maybe you can help one homeless person or one family without work or one single mother. Keep God’s name holy by: befriending our fellow human beings through emergency relief efforts that are helping victims: CLWR Gaza Humanitarian Emergency Response; ELCIC’s ELCJHL Emergency Appeal; the UN Refugee Agency; World Food Programme; and Canadian Foodgrains Bank. The opportunity to keep God’s name holy by being part of the endless opportunities available to us to shine God’s light.

Illuminate the spiritual freeway with the light of love. By loving God, you love others. By loving others, you make his name holy. Action is the sign of your freeway’s direction. It is a massive structure, this freeway of the Christian life. It is undergirded with the sturdy steel of God himself. It is paved with the smooth concrete of petitions that glorify God. It is lined, marked, lighted, and landscaped with our actions of praise.

When we pray and confess, “May your name be kept holy,” we are swinging onto the freeway of life. When we honour God as both the creator of life as well as the engineer of salvation, we need never fear

that the steel supports will weaken or the concrete paving will crack or that we'll get lost in the blur of unregulated spiritual traffic - as we confess the Lord's Prayer by a life that goes full speed down the freeway of joy.

Amen.

The Prayers of the People - Pentecost 3 - June 9, 2024

Creator God, you call us to love and serve you with body, mind, and spirit through loving your creation and our siblings in Christ. We ask that you open our hearts in compassion and receive these petitions on behalf of the needs of the church, the world and all in need.

God of faithfulness, bless Christians everywhere with the courage and compassion to be your living church, offering themselves to the world in unity and love. We pray for the church, that knowing your mercy in Christ Jesus, we might show forth your great love. Guide, inspire and encourage Bishops Anna, Linda, Susan and Kathy, newly elected bishops Jason and Ali, all pastors, priests, deacons, musicians and lay leaders. Today we pray for Chetwynd Shared Ministry in Chetwynd, Christ Lutheran in Chilliwack - Rev. Dean Andersen, for the Anglican and Lutheran deacons' gathering together this week; for the upcoming BC Synod convention; for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan and the Holy Land, and the congregation of San Juan Camino d'Esperanze and Pastor Ana Maria Jara.

God of wisdom, give us eyes to value the earth as an expression of your love. Give us wisdom to live upon it with a light carbon footprint, and with reverence, gentleness, care, and humility. We pray for the earth and its living and non-living beings: for wilderness and agricultural farmland, for cities and smaller towns; for oceans, lakes, rivers and streams. Give us wisdom to live as good stewards upon this beautiful earth.

God of mercy, we pray for the nations and peoples of the world, especially those that find themselves in conflicts, wars, and violence. Come with the mercy you have promised from of old. Be this world's hope, peace, and salvation.

God of compassion, touch the lives of all who suffer; physically, mentally, emotionally or because of substance use disorder. We pray for the family members and caregivers whose days are focused on caring for others. We pray for all who are oppressed, for those neglected or abused, frightened or despairing. We pray for all who cry out for healing and hope. Where there is despair, bring hope; where there is illness, bring health; Bind up our wounds, teach us compassion, and dry our tears. Be especially with those we name now out loud or in our hearts.

We pray for our whole human family, created in your image, and yet divided by race and class, gender and creed. Gather us around your table of mercy. Forgive us our sins and help us be committed to the ongoing work of restorative justice and reconciliation. Heal our fractious divisions that alienate us from one another.

Fill your church with bold witnesses and faithful disciples who work for justice, serve with compassion, share your love, and spread the gospel. Stir in the hearts of those who thirst for justice, that they bring peace, speak out against oppression, speak truth to power, and uphold human rights and preserve the dignity of each person across the globe.

God of the ages, we thank you for the saints. Through their lives of faithful witness may we glimpse your steadfast love. We give you thanks for all who have gone before us and now find their rest in you. Hold us in your mercy, until we are reunited in your great love.

Covenant God, visit your people and pour out your strength and courage upon us, that we may hurry to make you welcome not only in our concern for others, but by serving them generously and faithfully in your name.

Amen

God in Community, Holy in One, make us one Body from many as we pray as Jesus teaches us....

Our Father ...