

Hallowed Be Your Name

Series: Teach us to Pray

Date: 26 April 2020, 2nd Sunday after Easter

Location: St George's Online

Texts: Isaiah 6:1-8; John 12:20-36

What is the biggest issue in the world right now? If you had asked this question back in January you might have said the bushfires. Or maybe Climate Change. Or the US-Iran tensions. How quickly things have changed. Coronavirus fills our horizon. So much so that you might have missed some of the other things happening on the planet. A devastating locust plague in Africa and the subcontinent. An impending famine in countries across the globe. And in any case, how do you choose? We can be overwhelmed with need. What can we do? How should we pray? Where do we start?

In the Lord's prayer Jesus teaches us Who we pray to: Our Father in heaven who delights to give his children good gifts. He also teaches us what to pray. The Lord's Prayer has roughly 6 petitions or requests. The first 3 are about God. The second 3 about us. Today we're looking at the first petition - *Hallowed be your Name*.

I don't know about you, but I find this part of the prayer the most difficult to understand. What does it mean to hallow God's name? We hardly ever use the word *hallow* in everyday English. We might speak of the *hallowed* turf of the MCG. Or this Anzac weekend of the soil of Gallipoli, *hallowed* by the blood of fallen soldiers. By this we mean that the soil has been made holy or sacred. It must be treated differently from other things. To hallow something, to treat it as holy, is to give that thing the honour it deserves.

What then does it mean to ask God, may your Name be honoured as you deserve? I've spent quite some time this week trying to work out what story from the Bible would help us see what it means for God to be holy. Isaiah 6 is as good as any. Isaiah has a vision of God. He is high. Exalted. The train of his robe fills the temple. 6 winged angels fly about him calling to one another:

Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD Almighty

The whole earth is full of his glory.

At the sound of their voices the whole temple shakes and is filled with smoke.

It's an overwhelming experience for Isaiah. He's completely undone.

"Woe is me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.

Isaiah catches a glimpse of God. He sees his power. He sees his glory. He sees his holiness, if you like his moral perfection. And in seeing God, Isaiah sees himself. He sees there is an abyss between him and God that would swallow him up. He knows his own wretched imperfection. It's what British author Francis Spufford calls, the

human propensity to stuff things up. So often that comes out in what we say. Not only do we fail to honour God. We also dishonour those made in his image. And Isaiah knows it's not just an individual problem, it's also a corporate problem. Maybe you know that in your own life only too well.

If God's holiness highlights just how unholy we are, why on earth would Jesus tell us to pray this, and as the first thing to pray?! Is God like some narcissistic world leaders who need to be constantly told how good they are and who insist on everything being about them?

We find the answer to these 2 questions if we look at the place where God's holiness, his power, his glory are most clearly displayed. Where is that place? Jesus tells us in John 12. Jesus says,

“Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. 28 Father, glorify your name!”

Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.” The hour is Jesus' death. This is where the Father's Name is glorified. As Jesus says in the next chapter, “Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him.”¹ Here, in the shame and humiliation of the cross we see God's glory on display. Because his glory is to forgive the unworthy. His holiness is to wash the unclean. Even you and me. This is why the angel could say to Isaiah - your guilt is taken away and your sin is atoned for. The cross is where the Father's name is hallowed on earth as it is in heaven.

God is not a narcissist who pushes himself up by putting others down. He shows his glory by going to the depths to bring us up. He shows his glory by taking our humiliation upon himself that we might share in his glory.

And it is here, in his being lifted up on the cross, that Jesus says he will draw all people to himself. By his cross Jesus washes us clean. He brings us home. So as we kneel before the cross our hearts are lifted to honour and praise him. In honouring him we honour the Father. It's this Name, not another. He's our lover who has given his life that we might be his. He doesn't want us to give our hearts to someone or something else.

The prayer, *hallowed be your Name*, in fact is an invitation for us, like Isaiah, to enter the throne room. We can stand there by his grace. We can delight in his holiness because with his holy blood he has purchased our forgiveness. The prayer, *hallowed be your Name*, is an invitation for us to worship. To praise the Name. It's

¹ John 13.31

an invitation to join with the angels, to join with creation, to join with all God's holy people throughout the ages and around the world today and proclaim,

Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,

To receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise!²

What is the most important thing in the world right now? Where do we start? How do we pray? Jesus tells us to start with worship. *Hallowed be your Name*. Our creator is also our redeemer. The one through whom all things were made is also the one through whom all things are reconciled. He is the heartbeat of the story, God's story, the world's story, our story. When we stand before his throne in worship we see ourselves and the world rightly. In worship God reorders our hearts. He makes us ready to serve him and his world. More on that next week.

Today, stuck at home, separated from family and friends, will you come into the throne room of the King? Will you delight in the beauty of his holiness?

² Revelation 5.12