

Luke 11:1-2
Exodus 3:1-15

South Plains
Baby Cap Dedication Sunday

Take Off Your Shoes

I have struggled for two weeks with how to talk about the hallowing of God's name. We say the phrase in the Lord's Prayer every week, "hallowed be thy name," and I think we intuitively know that "hallow" has something to do with "holiness." But, what are we asking for in this prayer? What are we saying? I finally gave up and resorted to the story of Moses in the desert. It's a story not only of Moses' call to serve God, but also the gift of God's name to Moses and Israel. Before God reveals himself to Moses, he tells him to take off his shoes because he's standing on holy ground. Now, Moses does not make the ground holy by taking off his shoes. God makes that a holy place. In that holy place, God's name can be hallowed by this simple gesture. By taking off his shoes, Moses takes his first step towards recognizing that the name of God, the name we say as "LORD," is a hallowed name, a holy name. God will have his name hallowed. Our job is recognition.

When we pray, "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name," we are simply beginning to say who God is. God is the One whom all of heaven and earth should worship, would worship, and will worship when creation comes to its senses. So, there are two sides to the business of God's name being hallowed: There's the temporary arrangement called Christian

service, the time the church spends honoring God in worship in our sanctuaries and witness in the world. And, then there's the final, permanent arrangement when the whole creation will honor Father, Son and Holy Spirit at the end of time. "Hallowed be thy name" recognizes both present and future. We gather week after week to glorify God, but we know that our work is only prelude to the coming glory, the climactic glorying that will happen in God's good time.

This double-sided nature of hallowing produces some tension between the church and the world. We're involved in a drama that the whole creation is invited to join. It's the drama of the coming kingdom of God. But instead of acknowledging God, much of creation is oblivious. The world for its part, wants to go its own way; and it does, except for the persistent voice of the church calling the world to worship. We've got this tug of war going on with the church pulling in the direction of God's kingdom and the world pulling away. So we pray, "Hallowed be thy name."

How shall we hallow God's name? Some paraphrases for this prayer are found in other translations: "reveal your name" (Peterson); or "holy be your name;" or "let your name be held in reverence" (Tyndale Interlinear). Some ancient manuscripts for Luke's Gospel omit this phrase completely and read instead, "Your Holy Spirit come upon us and cleanse us." Apparently some people in the early church thought it was too much to ask that God's name be hallowed,

unless the Holy Spirit first would clean up humanity. What each of these alternatives have in common is that “hallowed be your name” is not a call to human action. It’s a hope for God’s glory to fill the earth like the waters cover the sea.

The trouble with this part of the Lord’s Prayer is that we ourselves are the reason God’s name is not hallowed. How many people look at us and see the image or reflection of God? Last week Debby and I visited North Carolina for a wedding. I was a guest so I got to wear a tie instead of my collar. Sooner or later at these gatherings, someone will look at me and ask casually, “And, what kind of work do you do?” On my better days, I tell them the truth, “I’ll a Presbyterian minister.” I usually get one of three responses:

- a) They find someone else to talk to.
- b) They tell me about their religious experience.
- c) Or, the worst response is, “I just knew you were a minister.”

I call this last response the worst because I know very well it has more to do with looking inoffensive and saying the Lord’s Prayer a little too loud. It has absolutely nothing to do with my preaching good news to the poor, or release to the captives or recovery of sight to the blind; or anything else that might reflect the glory of God. I am part of what hinders God’s name from being hallowed.

I do want to make a concrete suggestion about our role in moving toward the day when God’s name really is hallowed by all the worlds that are. Keeping Sabbath has

fallen out of fashion over the past century. I don’t think blue laws ever did a lot of good by closing the bars and grocery stores on Sunday. They did, however, make going to church easier. And, I do believe Christians make a difference in the world in the way we keep the Sabbath, the way we spend our time on Sunday. If this is just another day in the week for Christians, the people around us will never know it is the Lord’s Day.

There are all sorts of ways to keep Sabbath. At its heart, Sabbath has to do with rest, with interrupting our routine so that we take time to acknowledge three events that changed our lives. Exodus says, Keep Sabbath because the Creator rested on the seventh day. Deuteronomy says, Keep Sabbath because God has rescued us from slavery, and resting is part of our freedom. New Testament Christians changed the Lord’s Day from the seventh day Sabbath to Sunday because that’s the day Christ rose from death to life. I leave it to your imagination to invent ways to observe the fourth commandment and keep the Sabbath holy so that we acknowledge creation, freedom and resurrection as signs of faith week in and week out. Keeping Sabbath anticipates the coming of God’s kingdom.

I believe the name of God is especially hallowed by our baptism. Baptism marks us as children of God. The sacrament of baptism is one of those ceremonies like a wedding or a funeral that can command respect even from friends who do not share our Christian faith. It’s a public witness to grace.

The grace of parents who are committing themselves to rear this child in an environment of trust in the Lord.

The grace of a church promising to tell the stories of Jesus to Robert and Georgia and all the rest of us, not only in words, but also in the lives of love and integrity.

The grace of God the Father who creates life.

The grace of God the Son in whose name we are forgiven and brought to new life.

And, the grace of God the Holy Spirit sustaining each breath and hallowing each moment,... if only we will open our eyes to see what God is doing.

Receiving baptism, like all of worship, can seem commonplace. Taking off our shoes is an every day ritual. Putting a knit cap on a newborn is a simple gesture of maternal care. These actions become holy, they become occasions for the hallowing of God's name when our eyes open to the presence. The Holy Spirit empowers us to keep the vows we made today to share our faith with Robert and to support his family. Somewhere else, in a hospital or clinic with a dirt floor, a new mother wonders about hands that lovingly knitted a cap for her infant. And, when anxiety pulls any one of us toward temptation or despair or cynicism, we have the same resource that Martin Luther drew upon in hard

times. We can say with all the saints, "I am baptized! I am claimed by God, not because I am holy, but because a holy God will not abandon his own."

When we say those words, we gain a little ground on the tug of war between the world and the church.

Hallowed be your name! Amen.