

WHAT'S IN A NAME??

1 Kings 9:3

The LORD said to him: "I have heard the prayer and plea you have made before me; I have consecrated this temple, which you have built, by putting my Name there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there."

I had a professor in College who would not begin to teach unless he had pronounced everyone's name correctly. He would say a name as many times as it took to get it right. He told us that a person's name was more than a label; it was a symbol of who they were and that, in a name, one could tell a lot about a person. While this may not be universally true for names, I think it does carry a lot of weight. Names are important to people for many reasons and, in the case of Faith, the ways with which we refer to God can have great impact on how and what we believe about Him.

We call God by many different names. We read all of these names throughout the Bible and we choose the ones we use based on situations we are in or ways that we are feeling. Some of the names denote the power of God; some tell us about love and the goodness of God, while others try to explain the wonder and majesty of God. They are names such as Alpha and Omega, Messiah, Wonderful Counselor, Yahweh, Immanuel, Lord, and the list goes on and on. But in all these names, no matter which one we use, we are calling on the One in whom we put our trust and our faith. The names we use for God are a proclamation of who we believe Him to be. God's name is a special thing and it is to be used in special ways. In the scripture quoted at the beginning of this article, God makes a promise to Solomon. God promises that He will put His Name in the temple forever. It is important to Solomon that God show He is pleased with the building of the temple in some way. So God sets His name there and, in this way, God shows us the importance of His name. His name is a description of who God is and how He acts.

In my column last month, we looked at the beginning of the Lord's Prayer. As we continue to move through it, we go from the introduction into the first petition. The introduction, if you remember, tells us that God is our Father and that we can talk to Him as a child talks to their father. As Jesus teaches His disciples to call God 'Father', He also tells us that we can call God by the name of "father." However, we must learn how to treat that name. How are we to call on our Father and deal with the names for God? This is addressed for us in the first petition.

When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we say, "Hallowed be thy name." This somewhat odd turn of phrase means, 'Father, let your name be holy'. The German idiom used here means to praise, extol and honor, both in word and deed. Luther tells us that, "*God's name is certainly holy in itself, but we ask in this prayer that we may keep it holy.*" We pray that we may be able to honor the name of God and praise Him in all we do and say. We are asking for the ability to follow the second commandment, which states, "*You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.*"

It is easy to use God's name in inappropriate ways, such as in a curse or in swearing. We hear it used wrongly in our culture all the time. Our children learn to say, "Oh God" or "Jesus

Christ" when they are exasperated or upset or just to be funny. These phrases are used in movies and on TV, and they become such a part of our vernacular that we don't even realize how often it slips out. It can be a very hard habit to break.

Sometimes though, we use God's name as a front for something that is not really honest or does not honor God. We may do or say something in the name of God that is not really part of God's plan, or does not fit with His Word. When we do this, we have profaned Him. As sinful humans, we learn throughout life that we use the name of God inappropriately in both word and deed. We cannot help but use it inappropriately. However, Luther explains how we hallow God's name so that we may follow in those ways too. He says, "*God's name is hallowed whenever His word is taught in its truth and purity and we as children of God live in harmony with it. Help us to do this, heavenly Father!*" In his explanation, Luther asks God to help us keep His name holy because if we rely on our own volition, we cannot do so. Through the teaching of Jesus Christ, we are taught how to use God's name rightly in ways that do not harm and tell the truth about who God is. When we do this, God's name is hallowed. God does not need us to do this but He has chosen us each to spread His name throughout the earth!

Keeping God's name Holy is not always easy but our Heavenly Father promises to help us so that we can praise, extol and honor Him with all of the names we use for Him in all our words and deeds, as we remain as always...

In His Grip,

Pastor Karen

If you would like to learn more about God's names and His amazing love for you, you are most welcome at Grace Lutheran Church. We worship together on Sunday mornings at 10:30. We also offer a Children's church at the same time, so your children too will know the love of Jesus in their lives!