

**Hallowed Be Thy Name**

**February 25, 2018**

**Mark 8:31-38**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, the Messiah, and the Savior of the World, amen.

We Lutherans like the Lord’s Prayer. We say it a lot! We close our meetings and Adult Sunday School classes with it. Most of us say it at least once a day in our prayers. In worship we say the Lord’s Prayer every week, more often than we receive Holy Communion. In Confirmation class The Lord’s Prayer has a whole unit dedicated to studying each petition and we learn what it means. With all the emphasis on the Lord’s Prayer I still wonder how often we pray the words, “Hallowed be thy name” without giving them a second thought or really understanding what it is we’re asking God to do. Luther’s explanation in his catechism is excellent. What does this mean? God’s name is certainly holy by itself, but we pray in this petition that we too may keep it holy. How is God’s name kept holy? God’s name is kept holy when his Word is taught in its truth and purity and we as children of God lead holy lives according to it. Now, whoever teaches and lives contrary to God’s Word dishonors God’s name. This is what we’re asking God to do in those four simple words: “Hallowed be thy name.”

Maybe an illustration will help us understand our responsibility to keep God’s name holy. Imagine God is a president of the world’s biggest and most successful business, even bigger if it’s possible than Trump Enterprises... You’ve heard God is really a nice person, and you want to do business with this extremely kind person. So, you make an appointment and show up at the office. Hundreds of people are coming and going, and yet God has given you time on his busy schedule. You can’t wait to meet him. You enter the office complex and are greeted by a rather stuffy, straight-laced secretary. “What do ***YOU*** want?” she says. You begin to wonder if you’re in the right place. The secretary looks at her book and says, “I suppose you’re Mr. So-and-So. Sit down and take a seat. You people come parading in here as if the BOSS has all the time in the world. Don’t you know the BOSS has more important things to do?” You say “Excuse me, I must have the wrong place.” And you leave. The BOSS might be the nicest person in the whole universe, but if the receptionist is crabby or misrepresents the boss, people will get the wrong first impression never get to meet him. We are God’s receptionists. People don’t discover God by themselves. They find out about God and our Savior Jesus through someone else. They find God through YOU and ME.

In our text today, I see myself. In the verses just before our lesson, Peter makes a marvelous confession of faith, and in the next breath we see him say something awful. With all the miracles Jesus did, and with all the prophecies Jesus fulfilled in his life and ministry, and with all Jesus taught, a lot of people just didn’t get it. John the Baptist had been beheaded by Herod by this time. The people had accepted John as a prophet sent from God. Many of them believed Jesus to be something greater than John was - a prophet who had come back from the grave, some kind of a super-prophet, or superhero if you will. All the popular opinions about Jesus fell short of the truth. None said Jesus was the Son of God. They didn’t say he was the long-awaited Messiah. They didn’t say that he was the Savior of the world.

The popular opinions of the people in the world today are very similar. When the Revive Ohio movement was in it’s peak a couple of summers ago, a lot of people were introduced to Jesus and lots of baptisms were done. Our Lutheran rite of Baptism calls for a confession of faith and we use the words of the Apostle’s Creed for that purpose. In many other protestant traditions, they simply ask the person being Baptized what Jesus means to them. During all those Revival Baptisms I heard a common thread in each person’s confession. Nearly every person said something like Jesus is my Savior. He’s my all in all. Jesus is the one I want to follow. What I didn’t hear was that Jesus is the Son of the Living God sent to be the Savior of the entire world.

If you ask people who Jesus is, many will say he was a great religious teacher or he started one of the largest religions of the world. A recent poll suggests only 56% of all adults believe Jesus is God. When you break it out by generation, the percentage is higher among older folks and not surprisingly, the lowest percentage is among millennials.

When Peter confessed Jesus as the Messiah, Son of God, he got it right and Jesus gave him an A+. As our text begins today, Jesus is explaining what it means for him to be the Messiah. Peter’s A+ quickly falls to an F.

You and I may never have to answer this question before Jesus, but someone, somewhere, sometime will ask you, “Who do you think Jesus is?” What answer will you give? Will you give an answer? There is a story often told about a simple, Christian woman who washed clothes for a living. Wherever she went, she told people about Jesus. In her old age, Sally the washer-woman could hardly see. One day someone saw Sally outside the old Ben Franklin store, talking vigorously to the wooden Indian that stood there. On and on she went about Jesus. A few men sitting outside the barber shop next door watched for a while and laughed about her. Finally, someone went over to her and said, “Sally, I know you mean well, but do you realize you’re telling the wooden Indian about Jesus?” Sally stopped for a moment and said, “I’d rather be a live Christian talking to a wooden Indian than a wooden Christian not talking to anyone!”

When a friend says, “I think that all the religions in the world are the same - it doesn’t make any difference what you believe?” what will you say? If someone says, “I don’t really believe Jesus rose from the dead?” what will you say? If someone says they’ve tried to live a good life and they hope they’ve done enough to earn their spot in heaven, what will you say? Will you give a good, solid confession of your faith in Jesus as the Son of God and the only Savior there is? Will you tell them about God’s plan of salvation - that we are saved not by works or human effort, but through Jesus, God’s Son, who died on the cross to take away our sins?

Peter shows us another side of ourselves this morning. He reveals a side that’s less complimentary. This morning we see what happened when Peter tried to interfere with Jesus’ work. Another way to look at “Hallowed Be Thy Name” is to pray for God to keep us from getting in the way of God’s work. We pray God’s help to keep us from setting our minds on earthly things rather than the Kingdom of God. As soon as Jesus began to teach what it really means for him to be the Messiah and the Savior of the World, Peter changed his tune and rebuked Jesus. Jesus was not tempted, but replied “Get behind me, Satan!” In Mark’s gospel, this was the first time that Jesus spoke plainly about his death and resurrection. Jesus said that the Son of Man MUST suffer. The very first promise in Genesis 3:15, where it said the seed of the woman would bruise his heal, showed that the Messiah must suffer. There was no other way that people could be saved! It had to be this way or no way at all! But Peter didn’t want to hear this kind of talk! So, he scolded Jesus for talking this way! One moment Peter makes a marvelous confession of his faith and in the next moment the devil uses him to attempt to undermine God’s kingdom and destroy God’s plan of salvation. How can this be? Sometimes Christian’s are ignorant about all of God’s truth. We have blind spots in our Christian education. Sometimes it happens because Christians let their Old Adam or Eve speak instead of their New Creation in Jesus Christ.

I know there’s been many times I’ve gotten in Jesus’ way and tried to hinder the work of his kingdom. I suspect I’m not alone. Have any of us ever made a perfect confession of our faith all the time? I haven’t done much better than Peter. Sometimes we can make a wonderful confession of faith in our Savior! When we do, it is because God has used us and opened our mouths to declare his praises. And sometimes we can have in mind earthly things that get in the way of Jesus’ work. In the end, by God’s grace, Peter was saved and so are we. In the end, God did use Peter’s mouth for the good of his kingdom, and God will use ours also.

Now let’s go back to “Hallowed be thy name,” and rethink our prayer. Our Father in Heaven, if only we could always give people a good first impression of you and our Savior Jesus and speak only the truth about our you! Help us to do this, dear Father. God forbid we do not speak the truth about you. God forbid our actions turn anyone away from you! Keep us from doing this, dear Father… May we always make your name holy and may the assurance of your forgiveness give us peace for all the times we fail. Amen.