

Jesus' Prayer: Hallowed

Exodus 3:1-15

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."

But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain." But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations.

1 Peter 2:9-10

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

One Sunday after church, a family sat around the kitchen table. Six-year-old Susie was lost in thought, tracing designs with her fork in the mashed potatoes. As kids are apt to do, she suddenly asked her parents a serious question. "Why don't we use God's name?" Susie's parents were puzzled. "What do you mean, dear?" asked her mom. "I mean, why don't we call God by name?" she asked. "I don't understand," said her dad. "Well," explained Susie, "in church we always say 'Hallowed be thy name' but then we never call God that when we pray at home."

Susie raises some interesting questions. Why don't we call God "Hallowed"? Or, better yet, why don't we pay more attention to the holiness or sanctity of God's name? We repeat the phrase

casually - "hallowed be thy name" - without really thinking about the magnitude of what we're saying. If we knew we might fall silent in wonder and awe.

That's what happens to Moses. He's out tending to his father-in-law's sheep when he encounters the living God. Moses is filled with fascination and fear. He sees a burning bush and investigates. God calls him by name and Moses answers. God tells him to take off his shoes because he's standing on holy ground. Moses hides his face because he's afraid to look at God. He falls silent in awe and wonder.

You and I could learn a lesson here. We've lost our sense of fascination and fear. We've become overly familiar with God's name. We sing "Holy! Holy! Holy! Lord God, Almighty" and we say "hallowed be thy name" without any sense of awe and wonder. We need to recover a sense of God's holiness and majesty. We need to learn to take off our shoes in the presence of the divine.

Our Hebrew ancestors were very cautious about using the divine name. They believed even pronouncing it put the speaker in jeopardy. Saying the name of God was like releasing the power of a thousand thunderstorms. That's why the name YHWH, the most powerful of all God's names, was only spoken once a year by the High Priest when he entered the Temple's Holy of Holies.

The word "hallowed" is an old English word that means "holy or sanctified". It comes from a Greek word *hagios* which means "separate, different, or other." When we say "Hallowed be thy name", we're saying: May God's name be kept separate from all other names. May God's name be treated differently from all other names. May God's name be respected and honored like no other name.

Hallowing God's name speaks to God's nature and being. If God is "our Father in heaven", then God's thoughts are not our thoughts, God's ways are not our ways, and God's fatherhood is not our fatherhood. There's no way we can print "human" in such big letters that it turns into DIVINE. There's no way we can shout "humanity" so loudly the echo comes back GOD.

God's being is separate, different, and other. As one theologian said: "God is the Ineffable, a Word without synonyms, a Light that casts no shadow, a Profundity that has no measured depth." (Leonardo Boff)

If that's too theological and impersonal, maybe a better way to understand God's holiness is to explore our experiences of "the Holy." We all have holy places, holy moments, holy people, and holy things in our lives. Each of them is a reflection of divine holiness.

Have you experienced God's awesomeness? A praise song sings "our God is an awesome God, who reigns from heaven above, with wisdom, power and love, our God is an awesome God." Have you encountered God's awesomeness when we gather to worship or when you're outside enjoying our beautiful snowy Jemez mountains?

Have you ever trembled before the Lord? An African-American spiritual says it well: "Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble..." Moses trembled. "Don't come near,"

said the voice from the burning bush, “put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” Have you ever stood on holy ground?

Have you ever encountered the energy and urgency of God? Blaise Pascal, the great French mathematician and philosopher, always carried a scrap of paper with him. It was the record of his encounter with God’s holiness. It said:

*In the year of Grace, 1654,
On Monday, 23rd of November . . .
From about half past ten in the evening
until about half past twelve,
FIRE
God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob,
not of the philosophers and scholars.
Certitude. Certitude. Feeling. Joy. Peace.*

Have you felt consumed by God?

To pray, “hallowed be thy name” says something about God. It also says something about us. If God is separate, different, other, then, as God’s people, so are we. 1 Peter puts it this way, “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

“A chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people...” that, my friends, is our identity and our calling. Like God we are to be hallowed. We are to be unique, different and set apart.

Throughout church history, believers interpreted this holiness to mean set apart in isolation. A holy person lived alone in the desert or joined a monastery. They rarely interacted with society to avoid being corrupted by the world’s wickedness. We see this belief today.

Some Christians think holiness is about isolation. To them holy means being “holy than thou”. They fear their holiness will be corrupted if they interact with “questionable people”. They think their holiness will be tainted if the church accepts people who are different. They feel their holiness is lacking if they don’t pray or worship enough or if they can’t quote the Bible or give more financially to the church.

Beloved, biblical holiness or hallowedness is not about isolation or exclusiveness or being better than everybody else. It’s about justice and mercy. It’s about being set apart for a purpose.

God tells Moses, “I have seen the misery of my people and heard their cry. I know their sufferings and how the Egyptians oppress them. I have come to deliver them and lead them into a land flowing with milk and honey. Come, Moses, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people out of Egypt.” God doesn’t remain holy and aloof. God doesn’t sit in heaven where it’s safe. God interacts with creation and gets involved.

God comes to set the people of Israel free and lead them to the Promised Land. God tells Israel she is to be holy as her God is holy (Lev. 19:2). This holiness involves a special concern for the

poor, the stranger, hired servants, the deaf, the blind, women, and the aged. Israel's holiness means making sure the powerless and dispossessed receive justice.

When God comes in the person of Jesus Christ, this holy One hangs out with the oppressed and outcasts, the unclean and unacceptable. The holy One welcomes everyone into the kingdom and openly loves the whole world. In Jesus' life, death and resurrection, God's holiness is actively displayed for all to see and experience.

As God's people, you and I are part of a royal priesthood and holy nation. This means we are set apart, not for isolation, but for action. You and I are to declare God's wonderful acts in our words and deeds. We are to display our holiness by loving and serving God in the world. We are to show our holiness through acts of prayer, scripture reading and worship. We are to demonstrate our holiness by helping the hungry, homeless and heartbroken. We are to exhibit holiness in our behavior by incarnating God's justice and mercy in our daily lives.

"Hallowed be thy name..." It says something significant about us and about God. I can't think of a better prayer to help us recapture our sense of awe and wonder, to enable us to revive our sense of reverence and sacredness, to empower us to be a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, to be God's own people proclaiming God's mighty acts and calling others out of darkness into God's marvelous light.

May we live as we pray. Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Heaven and earth are full of thy glory. Hallowed be thy name!

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