

For The Sake Of My Holy Name
Ezekiel 36:22-28

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Do you remember your teachers telling you as you went on a field trip that you are representing the school? So, they wanted you on your best behavior? Maybe you made such a comment to your children when you went someplace, that as Jerabek's, they would bring dishonor to the family name if they misbehaved?

Invariably, when I am out and about with my clerical collar on, someone will either call me "Father" or "Pastor." I remember picking up some beer at Woodman's once after a hospital visit, still in my clerical, and someone asked me, "Are you a priest or pastor?" "Yes." "And you are buying beer?" "Yes!" "For yourself, or as a gift?" "Myself!" "Oh, you can be a Christian and drink?" "Yes, Jesus did make wine at the wedding."

His final response was interesting, "Hmmm, maybe I could be a Christian then."

A Higher Things t-shirt got Pauline and I engaged in a conversation with some women from the LCMS Lutheran Church in White Lake a couple weeks ago. My shirt was a label that I was Lutheran.

But it isn't just because we wear clothing that identifies us as Christians, our friends and neighbors know too. Furthermore, our lives should make others wonder what is different about us. You see dear friends, all believers bear the name of Christ, and we are to keep that name holy.

God's name is holy by itself, and He wants it to be kept holy. In our text, Ezekiel records God's attitude about His name. *Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them.* (vv. 22-23)

These are the words that God commanded Ezekiel to speak to His church, the house of Israel. These words were not to be spoken to unbelievers, but to those who are a part of God's church. They were spoken to God's chosen people – to those people who bore His name. That means that it was believers who profaned God's name. It was those who bore God's holy name, who had made God's name unholy – who profaned it – among the nations of the earth.

Do we profane God's name among the nations? To do so, all you need is to act in some sort of manner that brings dishonor to God's name. It really does not take much. Many people are willing to drag God's name through the mud and defame it, so all they need is a little excuse. When Christians do not act or speak according to what God's Word proclaims, God's name is profaned among the nations.

As Christians, we are to be living witnesses to Christ at all times. We are to make His name holy at all times by what we say and do. How do we do that? Luther's asks and answers that question in the Small Catechism, in regard to the 1st Petition of the Lord's Prayer: *How is God's name kept holy?* God's name is kept holy when the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we, as the children of God, also lead holy lives according to it. Help us to do this, dear Father in heaven! But anyone who teaches or lives contrary to God's Word profanes the name of God among us. Protect us from this, heavenly Father!

That is how God's name is kept holy. Unfortunately, we do not always lead holy lives according to the truth and purity of God's Word. Even more unfortunately, not all those who claim to bear God's name, teach that Word of God in truth and purity, their false teaching further profanes the name of God among people.

The world constantly profanes God's holy name. When people make fun of those whose lives are a living witness

to Christ, or who faithfully cling to the truth of God's Word – they profane God's name.

Sometimes though, when Christians are called names for what they believe, they will keep quiet. To keep silent when a faithful confession of the faith is called for, is nothing less than a way to further profane the name of God. In fact our failure to speak a bold confession of faith in the face of detractors of God's Word, is a sinful denial of the very name of God.

Dear friends, in our sinfulness, we often profane the name of God – sometimes in our actions, sometimes by our mouths, and sometimes with our silence.

But God does not leave us there, accused of our sinfulness and without any hope. Even more desperately we need to remember the rest of the message that Ezekiel was commanded by God to speak to His chosen people.

I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. (23-28)

God will vindicate the holiness of His name, He will clear His name from all guilt, and blame and suspicion, He will uphold the holiness of His name against all argument.

That happened upon the cross of Calvary. All sins were paid in full by the righteous and holy Son of God Himself. There, God vindicated His holy name, for He purchased forgiveness there for all those who have profaned His holy name.

Now His holiness is the possession of all those in whom His Spirit bestows faith in the work of Christ. God's holiness is what God graciously imparts to those whom He calls to bear His holy name. And then, His Holy Spirit works holiness in those who bear His name, so that His holiness might be seen in all nations.

What is it that is most holy about God's name? That He is a gracious and loving God. He chooses those whom He calls His children, and blesses them with His gracious love and forgiveness, even when they are disobedient. The entire Old Testament is a testimony to the faithfulness of God to His chosen people – especially in their rebelliousness to Him.

You are a living testimony to the faithfulness of God, for He makes His name holy in you. You are baptized into Christ's death, your sins put to death and buried with Christ. As He foretold in our text, He has sprinkled clean water on you, and you are cleansed from all your uncleannesses. You are baptized into Christ's resurrection – He makes you holy so you live a new life in His holy name. He gives you a new heart, and a new spirit He puts within you.

God said, "I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules." Whenever you gather at the table Christ sets before you of His body and blood and eat and drink, Christ gives you His heart, even as He removes your heart of stone. In this meal, your faith is strengthened, and Christ dwells in you, so that you walk in His footsteps.

All these things God does for you. And He does them for you, for the sake of the holiness of His name. His name is made holy, when you are made holy in His name, for you then are made a living witness to the gracious nature

of God's holiness.

Today, you have gathered in God's house. Do you do so because you already are holy? Or do you do so in order that God might again refresh you in His holiness? That is it exactly!

Here is where you dwell in the land that God gave to your fathers, and are made His people. Here is where God is your God that you might go out from here as living witnesses to His holiness.

God has done this all to you, so that on the last day, His words to Ezekiel might be fulfilled. You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. And in thankfulness to God's name being made Holy in us and through us, as God's beloved people, we respond, "Hallowed be Thy name."
Amen.