

Our Father...Hallowed Be Thy Name

Matthew 6:9

Sunday, January 17, 2021, Aledo UMC

Pastor Dave Schultz

⁹ (Jesus said unto them,) “After this manner therefore pray ye: ‘Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name...’”

Sermon, “Our Father...Hallowed Be Thy Name”

This is the first of ten sermons Pastor Dave will be preaching on the Lord’s Prayer

Last week I began my sermon by asking, “What’s the first thing you know?” The answer is in the theme song to *The Beverly Hillbillies*, which ran on CBS in the 1960s. This morning, I would like to begin my sermon by asking, “Who do you know?” It sounds like a good setup question, but sadly, I don’t have a punchline to go along with it.

In our culture, we tend to toss around the word *know* rather casually. What do I mean when I say I know someone? One of the potential hazards of this profession is that you meet a lot of people and sometimes it can be a challenge remembering everyone you’re supposed to know.

Earlier this year I happened to meet someone at a funeral who looked familiar. She was a young woman in her thirties, and I knew I should know her. After racking my brain for several minutes, it finally dawned on me who she was, so I said, “Weren’t you an emcee at the Orion Fall Festival a few years ago?”

I thought it was a pretty safe question. I once heard the story of a preacher who was stopped by a woman on the street one hot August afternoon. The preacher didn’t want to admit that he recognized her, but couldn’t remember just who she was. So he listened for clues. The woman happened to mention her husband, and the preacher thought that was a good clue. So he wiped the sweat from his brow and asked, “How’s your husband taking the heat?”

The woman’s jaw dropped, and she said, “Preacher, you buried my husband six months ago.”

By comparison, I thought asking about the Orion Fall Festival was pretty safe. The young lady laughed and said she had indeed been an emcee for the Fall Festival, but that’s not how people usually recognized her because she was Bailey Deitz who had been a reporter on KWQC for eight years. I knew that; I also knew she’d graduated from Sherrard High School.

I suppose I could say that I know Baily Deitz. After all, I’ve watched her on television. I’ve seen her at the Orion Fall Festival, and we talked together at a public gathering. So I know Bailey Deitz, right?

No. We’ve met, but what little relationship we had didn’t go beyond introducing ourselves to one another. At best, I have a passing knowledge of her. One might say that our relationship ended as soon as it began. I’m not even Facebook friends with Bailey. However, I did look her up on Facebook and I saw that six of my Facebook friends—including three from Aledo UMC—are also Facebook friends with Bailey Deitz. But you may not know her any better than me.

Is that how we know God? Some people have heard about God, but they only have a passing knowledge of God. They may have gone to Sunday school or church for a while. They

might even recognize the handiwork of God in the beauty of Creation. But they really don't know God.

Others have an introductory knowledge of God. They may have been confirmed at one time. But they never let their relationship with God go beyond that.

When we pray "Our Father," we are stating in prayer that we know God—not with a passing knowledge of God, but intimately, the way a child knows a father. Paul said it this way in his letter to the Galatians:

Because you are his sons and daughters, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba Father."⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir (Galatians 4:6-7).

Abba is an Aramaic word which is closer in meaning to Dad or Papa. It suggests an intimate relationship, rather than a formal or more distant relationship which might be implied in the word Father. Most Bible scholars agree that the Our Father of the Lord's Prayer was really intended to be a more intimate address to God such as Abba or Papa. Nonetheless, Our Father conveys far more intimacy than Our Master, which is the point Paul was making in Galatians 4. Likewise, Jesus says in John 15—

I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you (vs. 15).

We do not relate to God as Master, even though God would have every right to demand that of us. Rather, we relate to God as Dad. When we pray Our Father, we are praying from the vantage point of intimacy with God. But how did we attain that vantage point? Once again, we turn to John chapter 15 where Jesus says—

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you (vs. 16).

In the human realm, no child has ever picked his or her own parents—at least not his or her biological parents. The decision (such as it may be) belongs to the parents, not to the child. And while I realize that we become the children of God in part because of what Billy Graham described as one's "hour of decision," we nonetheless cannot say that we are children of God because we chose God. We are children of God for one reason and one reason alone: God chose us. God chose to adopt us into his family.

Missionary Theologian Lesslie Newbigin rightly observed that "we know a person only as he (or she) chooses to reveal himself, and only as our own spirit is sensitive and trustful to respond to his (or her) revelation."

In other words, the only reason we have any hope of knowing God is that God chose to make himself knowable to us. But here's the thing about God's self-disclosure: God did not choose to impart mere information about himself; God chose to reveal his heart to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

Through the incomprehensible work of Christ on the cross of Calvary we have been given the right and the ability to become the sons and daughters of God, not because we chose him, but because he chose us. And we have the privilege of approaching him not as Master, but as the sons and daughters of our Divine Dad.

Nonetheless, we balance that approach with an understanding that our Divine Daddy is holy; God's name is to be "hallowed."

For the most part, in our culture, a name is just a name, a label for a person. But that was not the case in the Hebrew culture of the Ancient Near East. Back in that culture, a name revealed character and essence of being—or at least that was the hope.

There is an old story about Alexander the Great of Macedonia, who, in the 4th Century BC conquered the known world. On one of his military missions, a young deserter from his army was brought before him. The king asked the young man: "What is your name?"

Timidly, the deserter replied, "My name is Alexander."

Furious, the king asked him again, "What is your name?"

And again, the young soldier replied, "My name is Alexander."

To which Alexander the Great said: "Then either change your conduct or change your name."

As an aside, we all bear the name "Christian;" do you think there may be times when God says to us, "Either change your conduct or change your name?"

What do we mean when we address our Father in heaven and say, "hallowed be thy name"? It means that we are declaring that God is by nature perfectly holy; holiness makes up the character of God. In contrast, we as human beings are not holy. We are by nature, sinful and unclean. And yet, the holiness of God calls us to holiness. That's a common theme of the Old Testament law:

Leviticus 11:44, "I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy...⁴⁵ I am the Lord, who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore, be holy, because I am holy.

When we pray, "Hallowed be thy name," we're reminding ourselves of our own need to be holy for the God whom we worship is holy. "Hallowed be thy name" is also an expression of praise and it comes early in the prayer because when we come before God we would do well to enter into God's presence with praise. The psalmist said:

Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands. Serve the Lord with gladness; come before his presence with singing...Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise; be thankful unto him and bless his name (Psalm 100:1-2, 4).

We come into God's presence with praise rather than beginning with our wish list of things we want. After all, that's why we have been created. Isaiah 43:7 tells us that we were created for God's glory. Likewise, in Revelation 4:11, John records the song of heaven:

Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

This has tremendous implications for us as a church. It means that what you think is the primary purpose of the church may not be the primary purpose of the church.

Many people believe that the church exists for the sake of the people of God. Not true. The primary reason why the church exists—the primary reason why Aledo United Methodist Church exists—is to glorify our Father in heaven.

We do not exist for our own purpose or even for the sake of our community. We exist to glorify God through our words and our actions. As a church, anything else we do has to flow out from that reason for being.

Church, by the way, is an “our.” I’m not talking about how long the service lasts; I’m talking about three little letters: O-U-R. As in “Our Father.” Those relational words are not limited to our Divine Dad. Those relational words embrace neighbor as well as well as God. When we enter into a relationship with God, we automatically enter into a relationship with everyone else who calls God Father and we create a relational community with all of our spiritual siblings.

God’s intent for us is that we be in caring relationships with other Christians. *Our Father* is meant to be prayed in community with others, whether in a congregation or virtually, but always with our spiritual siblings.

And just as no child ever picked his or her parents, so children do not pick their siblings. When we say, *Our Father*, we are connected to people who may be quite different from us: hip-hoppers and hipsters and hicksters and tattoo-bearers and vegans and carnivores and millennials and picketers and parolees and Puerto Ricans and Packer fans and people who smell and people who swear and people who just annoy the snot out of you. But Jesus still says, “You did not choose me, but I chose you.” And he goes on to say, “This is my command: Love each other” (vs. 17).

Because God isn’t just your Daddy; he’s your neighbor’s Daddy, too. And as we love neighbor, we embrace our neighbor as our spiritual sibling. When we love God, we love neighbor because God isn’t just my Father; he’s your Father, too. He’s *our Father*.

Prayer

Thank you, Father, for revealing yourself to us through your Son, Jesus Christ. Thank you, Father, for choosing us. And thank you, Father, for adopting us as your children. In Jesus’ name. Amen.