

Lent Midweek 2 – March 8, 2017
Text: Matthew 4:1–11
Theme: Hallowed Be Thy Name

Tonight we continue our Lenten series on the Lord’s Prayer. The first thing we say to our Father who art in Heaven is “Hallowed be Thy name.” There are few words in all of Scripture that puts us in our place more effectively than those words. Those words spotlight our sinful ambition. This is how.

A university student told a pastor that she had been trying to connect with God, but unsuccessfully. She had been reading her Bible and praying but nothing seemed better. Her insightful pastor asked whether she had prayed for forgiveness when she was praying. Like the rich young man with whom Jesus once spoke, this young woman replied that she hadn’t broken the Ten Commandments, so why did she need forgiveness? So the pastor went through them with her, one at a time. She claimed to have kept each of them in thought, word and deed. Eventually, the pastor asked the student whether there was anything at all that could come between her and God. She answered,

“I will have to say, honestly, the only thing that could come between us would be if following God would prevent me from pursuing my career.”

It took a while to dig this far down, but at bottom of it all, this student’s motto turned out to be “hallowed be *my* name.” She didn’t think she had broken any of God’s Ten Commandments, yet she was treading all over the very first one. She was not calling on God to know his will. She didn’t care what his will was if it conflicted with hers. This person, like so many, remained devoted to her will, even when it meant abandoning God’s will.

God never intends for us to develop our own particular path. He wants us to pray, "Hallowed be Thy name." Our Father's name is to be first in all areas of our lives. His name is over everything we do. Our window for this petition of the Lord's Prayer shows a blazing yellow triangle with the Hebrew letters for God's name in the center of it. His name covers us in light and holiness and places us on his path.

The temptation account in Matthew 4 tells of three attempts the devil made to lead Jesus to establish his own path. First, the devil in effect said, "Look at you. You're out here in the middle of nowhere with no food and you're hungry. God has forgotten you. Why should you remember him? I think you should do something nice for yourself. Make yourself some bread to eat."

The second temptation was, "Make a name for yourself." That's what would have happened if Jesus had jumped off the temple and found himself spectacularly rescued by angels swooping down to catch him before he touched the ground. Jesus would have made the Flying Wallendas look like hacks.

Finally, the devil said to Jesus: "Here, let me be helpful. I'll make a name for you. Just worship me." As the three temptations progressed, he dangled a greater reward before Jesus each time. He started with lunch and ended with all the kingdoms of the world.

Pay attention because the devil uses the same pattern with you. He wants you to abandon your identity as a child of God. All the while, he steadily entices us with offers that increase in magnitude and attractiveness. Sometimes he

offers things that even seem ok. Look what he did with Jesus. Everyone's gotta eat, right? There is nothing wrong with eating when you are hungry. Exercise is good for you, and the gym is practically empty on Sunday morning.

Volunteering in the community is good, even if that means I have to do less at church.

On Ash Wednesday, we talked about Christians thinking and speaking of God in ways that trivialize him. Another way of trivializing God lies before us today: a religion of self. A religion of putting my wants and desires before God; my plans before God's. My path first, and God is welcome to come along if he likes.

Self-improvement seems nobler than merely looking out for one's own happiness. Someone might want to lose weight or quit smoking or curb their anger. In and of themselves, there is nothing wrong with any of these things. In all the temptations the devil threw at Jesus, none of the projected outcomes stood out as bad in and of themselves. Jesus would have bread to eat and people to stand in awe of him. And Jesus did come for all the kingdoms of the world. In a way, the devil was offering to help Jesus accomplish his goals, right?

Earthly accomplishment is not our god. The more we travel alone down the various roads of self-improvement and goal-attainment, the more God's name can be forgotten. Who needs God when we are so successful?

Jesus was not in it for goal attainment or self-improvement. The prayer, which he taught us to pray, does not say, "Make me holy, heavenly Father," That sounds so pious and nice. But Jesus says for us to pray, "May *your* name be holy, Father." Watch the verbs in worship. When the subject of the verb is me, beware. Instead of speaking about my holiness, the Lord's Prayer draws me to God's holiness. But, God is already holy, so this petition does not ask for a change in God, but for a change in me. The catechism says, "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."

As God's children, we have his name. At Baptism we were adopted into his family. So we live as Jesus lived, by God's holy word, not by the devil's inducement to self-advancement, self-improvement or self-aggrandizement. Our holiness neither starts nor ends with ourselves. It comes entirely by being the brothers and sisters of Jesus with whom we share the same name. And the one whose name we share, will lay out a path for us, and his name will be hallowed as we walk his path.