

“The Name Above All Names”

Meditation Preached by The Rev. Jennifer Cameron

July 19, 2020 – St. Columba Presbyterian Church, Belleville

Hymns for Worship Video – July 19, 2020

Come, Ye Thankful People, Come #803 in the Book of Praise – Vv. 2 & 3

(Words adapted to be consistent with the Book of Praise)

All the world is God's own field
Fruit unto God's praise to yield
Wheat and weeds together sown
Unto joy or sorrow grown
First the blade and then the ear
Then the full corn shall appear
Lord of harvest grant that we
Wholesome grain and pure may be

For the Lord our God shall come
And shall take the harvest home
From the field shall in that day
All offenses purge away
Give the angels charge at last
In the fire the tares to cast
But the fruitful ears to store
In God's storehouse evermore

George Job Elvey | Henry Alford | Joel Raney

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Holy, Holy, Holy #303 in the Book of Praise

Holy, holy, holy.

My heart, my heart adores you!

My heart is glad to say the words:

You are holy, Lord.

Deiu saint, Dieu saint, Dieu saint :

Mon couer, mon cœur t'adore !

Mon couer le sait, mon couer te le dit :

Sacre est ton nom.

Repeat English Verse

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God, Whose Giving Knows No Ending #663 in the Book of Praise – All Verses

God, whose giving knows no ending, from your rich and endless store,
Nature's wonder, Jesus' wisdom, costly cross, grave's shattered door:
Gifted by you, we turn to you, offering up ourselves in praise
Thankful song shall rise forever, gracious donor of our days

Skills and time are ours for pressing toward the goals of Christ your Son:
All at peace in health and freedom, races joined, the church made one.
Now direct our daily labour, lest we strive for self alone;
Born with talents, make us servants fit to answer at your throne.

Treasure too you have entrusted, gain through powers your Grace conferred.
Ours to use for home and kindred, and to spread the gospel word.
Open wide our hands in sharing, as we heed Christ's ageless call,
Healing, teaching and reclaiming, serving you by loving all.

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Scripture Texts: Isaiah 44:5-8

⁵ *Some will say, 'I belong to the Lord';
others will call themselves by the name of Jacob;
still others will write on their hand, 'The Lord's,'
and will take the name Israel.*

⁶ *"This is what the Lord says—
Israel's King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty:
I am the first and I am the last;
apart from me there is no God.*

⁷ *Who then is like me? Let him proclaim it.
Let him declare and lay out before me
what has happened since I established my ancient people,
and what is yet to come—
yes, let them foretell what will come.*

⁸ *Do not tremble, do not be afraid.
Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago?
You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me?
No, there is no other Rock; I know not one."*

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

²⁴ Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶ When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

²⁷ “The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’

²⁸ “‘An enemy did this,’ he replied.

“The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’

²⁹ “‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’”

³⁶ Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.”

³⁷ He answered, “The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸ The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, ³⁹ and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

⁴⁰ “As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. ⁴² They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.

Meditation

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Names are an important part of our lives. We all have at least two, a first and a last. Some have middle names, some have more than one middle name. Some are called by their first names, and some are known by a 2nd, 3rd, or 4th name! People’s names often have special meaning in families. Our oldest son’s middle name was given to honour the memory of my husband’s Great Uncle, and our youngest boy’s middle name is my Dad’s family’s name. We have fond feelings for these names and it meant a lot to us to give them to our children.

Then there are the nicknames. I have nicknames for my kids that only I am allowed to use for them. They’re what we call the “Mom names.” My Dad sometimes called me by my first and middle initials when I was growing up, and he will sometimes shorten our boys’ names when goofing around with them. They and their friends have fun ways of identifying each other. It

becomes rather confusing to keep track of who they say they are going to hang out with when they use anything other than their given names!

Names have historical or cultural meanings too. I recently heard a beautiful Mohawk name given to a son to indicate his being the firstborn. A young woman I met from Malawi a few years ago was named Trinity because her parents were such devoted followers of Jesus, and when she had her first baby, a daughter, the name she was given translated in English to “beautiful.” My own name, Jennifer, means “the fair one.” Our last name is from the Gaelic meaning “crooked nose” or “crooked river,” which is rather fitting considering how many times my husband’s nose has been broken! My family name, Heath, from the Old English means “untended land where flowering shrubs grow,” or “one who dwells on the heathland.” It’s always interesting to look into the origin of names.

Biblical names are fascinating, especially when you don’t always realize they have biblical connections. Sophia means “wisdom.” Michael means “who is like God?” Emma means “my God has answered” in Hebrew. Lucas means “bringer of light.” Gabriel means “God is my strength.” Although these are not the best-known *biblical* names, like Matthew or Mary, they are names we encounter that have biblical meanings. See what I mean by saying it’s fascinating?!

Within the two Scripture readings today we see multiple names, all for the One, Triune God. In Isaiah we see, King, Redeemer, first, last, God, Rock. In Matthew we see Jesus, Son of Man, Father, and a reference to the Son of Man being the sower of good seed. That’s a lot of names in two short passages. Throughout the Bible we encounter an abundance of names for God – some as direct references and some that describe who God is, whether as the God of Israel or God incarnate in the person of Jesus:

- Yahweh
- Jehovah
- Creator
- Ancient of Days
- Abba
- Saviour
- Messiah
- Teacher, and so on.

When we pray we use a variety of ways to address our God, usually as adjectives: loving God, merciful God, forgiving God, God of hope.

But even with all of these references, these ways of identifying our God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – the name of God is the name above all names. No matter which person of the Trinity we name, it is the name above all names.

*Jesus my Redeemer, name above all names, precious Lamb of God, Messiah, oh for sinners slain.*¹ The words of the popular hymn remind us that there is no greater name on which we call. God is God, and none is above him.

¹ There is a Redeemer, #358 in the Book of Praise. © 1982 Universal Music - Brentwood Benson Publishing (Admin. by Brentwood-Benson Music Publishing, Inc.) Birdwing Music (Admin. by Capitol CMG Publishing)

The Women of Faith Study Bible shares this about Isaiah 44:5:

“...God instructs the Israelites to place reminders of God’s laws on their foreheads and hands..., so they won’t forget his laws or him. In a role reversal in Isaiah 49:16, God reveals that he’s written his people’s names on the palms of his hands. Just as they are not to forget the Lord, he inscribes their names upon his hands as a sign that he will never forget them. Actually, it’s not possible for God to forget his children, but it remains a powerful image of comfort and security to the Israelites, and to us.”²

In these days of heightened awareness and repenting of systemic racism and prejudice in our world, the idea of one person “belonging” to another, as property, is sickening. It’s wrong, and certainly not what God intends for his people. All people were created in God’s image and therefore all are equal in God’s eyes. It’s so very sad that people have not viewed each other through God’s eyes, but have instead seen skin colour, culture and economic status as way to put others down, mistreat others, and gain destructive power over others. As much as the language of “belonging” may trigger discomfort, guilt and anger in these days, and rightfully so, the belonging to which Isaiah is referring is not an ownership thing. Belonging to God means we are God’s children. We are God’s special creation that has been deemed the crowning glory of God’s creation. *What is humankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honour (Psalm 8:4-5).*

Belonging, in this sense, means we are a part of something, welcomed, accepted, valued. We belong to God because we are created by God to be a part of this family. We belong to Jesus because he is the Son of God, and his acceptance and welcome of all people is that of God. We belong to the church, not as an institution but as a spiritual body of faithful worship, witness and service; support, love and grace. I had yet another conversation with a colleague this week in which we agreed the church is not closed, just the building. The church never closes because the church is a people belonging to something more special than anything on earth could ever offer. We belong to a Creator whose name is above all names – Yahweh, Abba, God.

A few verses later in this reading from Isaiah we see a hint of ridicule of those who make idols to worship. The prophet describes, as my study bible puts it, “the absurdity of creating idols and worshipping them. People use some of their wood to build a fire to warm themselves and cook their food and then use the rest to fashion an idol... How can a powerless people create powerful gods? They can’t; and this practice, if it weren’t so pitiful, would be laughable. People can’t save themselves with something that’s even less capable than they are. Salvation occurs when the stronger rescues the weaker. Only the powerful God can save his people from sin’s mire and destruction. Yet, even today, people try to save and satisfy themselves with everyday idols...”³

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² The NIV Women of Faith Study Bible, Zondervan, Grand Rapids MI, 2001, Pg. 1181, Comment on Is 44:15-17, “Everyday Idols”

³ Ibid.

How can we worship anything, anyone, other than the One with the name above all names? How can we praise any other than the One who calls us by name, writes our names on his hands to show us we are never forgotten, and welcomes us all with the same grace, forgiveness and unparalleled love? Idols cannot do any of that. They are not real. They are just tokens that remind us of something we want, not necessarily something we need. God is what we need. Desperately.

My preaching professor at Knox College, the Rev. Dr. Stephen Farris, stressed the importance of being genuine in the pulpit. There is certainly an element of drama in the act of preaching. If I were to sit here with a monotone voice and no facial expressions it would be difficult for you to stay with me. It's hard enough that there's a glare on my glasses that sometimes gets in the way of those facial expressions. But the drama is not for the purpose of disguising myself. The drama of preaching is the drama of life. Life isn't monotone with no facial expressions, so why should preaching be like that? It would not reflect real life, in which the real Gospel guides us. The Gospel is genuine. God is genuine. God's love for and acceptance of each one of us is genuine. And God knows whether each one of us is being genuine with him. God knows the difference between wheat and weeds, and has the power to change weeds into wheat by the power of the Spirit.

Fred Craddock was a professor of preaching and New Testament at the Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Georgia. He was internationally respected and loved as a preacher and teacher. He was a remarkable story teller. In a sermon on this parable of the weeds and the wheat, he talked about the servants wanting to pull the weeds and the boss telling them to leave them alone lest they pull up the wheat. The servants wouldn't know the difference between the weeds and the wheat. Craddock, while reflecting on the disastrous consequences of people determining who is the weed and who is the wheat, and the terrible hurt it can cause, reflected on his own inability to tell the difference, and how good it is that there is someone else who knows better. "Folks, I am telling you, I do not know a weed from wheat. I do not know a weed from a flower. I pull back the swing blade ready to assault this bunch of weeds, and here comes my wife,... saying, 'Wait, wait, wait, wait!' Then that night at the supper table, there is that 'weed' in a vase in the center of the table. It looked like a weed; I thought it was a weed. I do not know a weed from a flower, and every church I have known that tried to weed the garden made horrible, horrible mistakes. Because, you see, that is God's business. God said, 'In the harvest, I will take care of all that. I am the only one who knows weeds from wheat.'"⁴

God is the only one who knows weeds from wheat, who knows the sincerity of professed faith in him. God is the only one who really knows whether a heart is genuine, and the Holy Spirit can act in that person's life to ignite the spark of genuine faith. God knows when a heart genuinely trusts him, and God calls that person by name. The Name Above All Names knows his people, knows our names, writes our names on his hands and never, ever forgets us. How reassuring that we belong to a Creator that knows us – really knows us – and gives each of us the same high value as every other person. The Creator of all that is, knows us far deeper than what

⁴ Craddock, Fred. The Cherry Log Sermons. Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville KY, 2001, Pg. 29 (Ebook).

is seen on the outside, whether it be physical appearance or behaviour, and accepts each of us as a special member of the family of God. How reassuring for us, and what a pointed reminder that our names can be so much more than what is printed on a birth certificate. They are written on the hands of God, connecting us to the One with the name above all names for eternity. Amen.