

Whose Name?

Isaiah 9:1 But there will be no *more* gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make *it* glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. 2 The people who walk in darkness Will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, The light will shine on them. 3 You shall multiply the nation, You shall increase their gladness; They will be glad in Your presence As with the gladness of harvest, As men rejoice when they divide the spoil. 4 For You shall break the yoke of their burden and the staff on their shoulders, The rod of their oppressor, as at the battle of Midian.

Matthew 4:12 Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee; 13 and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. 14 *This was* to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: 15 "THE LAND OF ZEBULUN AND THE LAND OF NAPHTALI, BY THE WAY OF THE SEA, BEYOND THE JORDAN, GALILEE OF THE GENTILES-- 16 "THE PEOPLE WHO WERE SITTING IN DARKNESS SAW A GREAT LIGHT, AND THOSE WHO WERE SITTING IN THE LAND AND SHADOW OF DEATH, UPON THEM A LIGHT DAWNED." 17 From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." 18 Now as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. 19 And He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." 20 Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. 21 Going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the *son* of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them. 22 Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him. 23 Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people.

1 Corinthians 1:10 Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. 11 For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's *people*, that there are quarrels among you. 12 Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ." 13 Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? 14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 so that no one would say you were baptized in my name. 16 Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other. 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void. 18 For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Loving Creator, shine as a light before me that you may be seen and not I.
Give me words that I may speak, give us ears that we may hear and through
your Holy Spirit help us understand.

Amen.

I spend a great deal of time watching and listening. I watch what is
happening in the world and I try to listen to what people say. As painful as it
is, I listen to popular culture to get a sense of what is going on.

Something I notice with the more brazen celebrities is the expressions they
use. Expressions like “That’s hot!” That one irritates me, or “Oh my god.”
That one offends me. I think it offends others.

It is not everywhere. When I listen to the main stream media, people are
careful not to say “o my god.” They have been coached not to use that
expression because it offends some Americans. They networks are careful to
avoid offending people.

I remember when I was a kid, we had moved to NJ where that expression
had taken hold with the kids in my cub scout pack. I don’t think any of them
were churchgoers. When I started using that expression, my mother got quite
upset. She took her faith seriously and we did not take the Lord’s name in
vain.

I had no idea what that meant, really, it didn’t seem to be my fault if God
had a vain name. but if mom was going to get that upset I was going to
watch out.

I did not stop using the expression, , because even though I tried to only use
it so I could be cool with my friends, I would let it slip at the most
inopportune times, much to my mother’s chagrin. Like I’d be watching TV
and something exciting would happen and I’d say “O my God.” And my
mother would hear and she would get upset.

It was the same in my house growing up as it is in most homes: if mamma
ain’t happy, ain’t no one happy. And since I did not want to bring her anger
down on me, I tried to stop saying that offensive thing.

I didn't want to take the Lord's name in vain, if God wanted to be vain it would be God's choice. So I worked at it, and I did manage to excise it from my casual conversation.

Fear of mother's anger seemed to do the trick.

I have to admit to being nostalgic sometimes. Not just for my childhood but for days of old. As a pastor this has occupied my thoughts. I look back on the old days when preachers really had some powerful tools in their arsenals. Two of the big ones being fear and guilt.

Those would be great to be able to use them today. Jonathan Edwards sermon Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God was all about fear.

Your wickedness makes you as it were heavy as lead, and to tend downwards with great weight and pressure towards hell; and if God should let you go, you would immediately sink and swiftly descend and plunge into the bottomless gulf, and your healthy constitution, and your own care and prudence, and best contrivance, and all your righteousness, would have no more influence to uphold you and keep you out of hell, than a spider's web would have to stop a falling rock.

Fear, engrained into generations of Americans had people coming to church for fear that God would get them. Many denominations place a high value on fear, even today. Convincing people that God was angry and vengeful was a way to fill the revival tents and the church pews, and, too often, the pockets of crooked clergy.

Fear and guilt are tools that have been shown to be effective, to a point. But they are not good tools for the long haul.

I was afraid to say that offensive statement, but I still found myself saying it at times.

Eventually, I said it one too many times in front of my mother, and she got so angry, I thought this is it. And she sat down with me and she said do you know what you are saying? I said that it was just something to say.

That was when it dawned on her that I did not understand, and she put it quite simply. She said , every time we call to God, God listens, and if we keep calling God all the time without meaning it, that is quite rude. At least that is how I remember that, and it made sense.

This is the name to call our creator, not just some expression.

In Jewish tradition the name of God, is spoken only once a year, I believe at the festival of Purim. The name was not to be used willy-nilly.

This is a name beyond names a name to be revered and worshiped.

Our God is with us all the time listening, responding.

What God offers us is love and its fruit, as the prophet envisions

The people who walk in darkness Will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, The light will shine on them. You shall multiply the nation, You shall increase their gladness; They will be glad in Your presence As with the gladness of harvest,

God calls to us to come and find this blessing: joy and gladness, light and blessing. This is what is there for us as we follow.

That is what Jesus did, he found those who would follow him, not because of fear or because of guilt, but because they were committed to God's work, to God's way.

Now as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."

Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. Going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the *son* of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.

Every time I read this passage I am struck by what happens here. Jesus comes upon these people by the lakeshore and he says follow me. There seems to be no coercion here, no fear invoked, no guilt.

Can we picture Jesus on the lake shore saying, “Follow me or spend eternity in the fiery lake gnashing your teeth” ?

He doesn't sound any better as a nagging Jewish mother, “where did I go wrong? Why won't you follow, am I not good enough for you?”

Jesus calls with a kind of love that says “come and see what I will show you. Follow me and you will find something you never expected. Follow me and you will know the joy of God's love and blessing.”

Jesus calls to them, and they follow.

Whose name is Jesus calling?

Is Jesus calling your name.

Is he calling to you, come and follow me?

I mentioned a friend named Donna a few weeks ago. She started going to church because she was missing something and she found a welcoming community for her and her sons. One of the things that Donna cared about was clothing for children.

Being a single mother of boys she saw this as a need for herself, but also for others. So many children need clothes, and there is an abundance of decent children's clothing around.

Donna felt a need to do something and to make a difference. She went to the equivalent of their church council and asked if she could have a clothing ministry in the church; she would need some storage space and regular times to be open. The church was thrilled to say yes and she was thrilled to get started.

Within a few weeks she had boxes and boxes of clothes.

She had one simple policy: bring what you can; take what you need.

She had the best time finding clothes and helping people find what they needed when they came in to look.

She had such a good time that it would have been difficult to call it work, although she worked quite hard keeping it going until the church lost use of that space.

Jesus called to her and said come follow me; clothe the naked because when you do so to the least of these my sisters and brothers you do it to me.

Jesus called and said follow me, and Donna found blessings beyond what she ever envisioned as she answered Jesus' call to follow.

She was called by Jesus, "follow me."

Paul knew who calls us, and Paul knew in whose name we are gathered. He also saw the potential for confusion.

He wanted to be sure that people understood they were not baptized in his name or in Peter's name. Christians are baptized in Jesus name.

Many startup churches have this issue. A dynamic pastor can attract a thriving following filling churches, filling arenas and getting people all charged up.

Charismatic leaders have been able to build large congregations because they are popular, and smooth, and charming, but when they are gone, that group may have a difficult time finding direction.

This happens in the world of politics. When King Solomon died his sons split the kingdom. Rome saw many such divisions.

You were not baptized in my name, says Paul.
You were baptized in Jesus name.

Jesus calls our name and says follow me.
It is a command, not a threat.
It is an insistent invitation.
Follow me.

It is a call of hope, follow me.
It is a call to action, follow me.

It is a call to turn and find the God who offers us love and life abundant.
Follow me.

It is a call to lay down our nets and take up our cross and follow him.

Not out of fear or guilt but from love and commitment.

I learned that about using God's name. I did not stop doing it because of fear, even though fear of mom goes a long way, no, I stopped taking the Lord's name in vain because .

I love God. I don't wish to be rude to God. It is not because I am afraid that God will strike me down. It never happened before; it has to do with relationships.

I could start using one of your names instead. Like I would not get excited and exclaim, "oh my Roy!" or "oh my Kim, or Elaine, or take your pick. It would be odd and perhaps a bit rude if you happened to be right there.

The name we call upon in prayer is the one we follow.

Paul says it well. Here in Monson we could say, some of you are of Mark and some of Judy, and some are of Doug and others of Bob. Is Christ divided?

Whose name is it that calls us here?

Do you come here because Bob is a nice guy?

Some people came because they liked a pastor, or someone else in the church and then left because their favorite person left.

In whose name do we come?

It is the one who said follow me.

In whose name have we found our salvation?

Jesus began by finding others to share his way. He taught, and he healed, and when he confronted the evil that resides within each of us, he was crucified.

He died, he died for all who follow him, he died in whose name?

He died in my name; he died in your name.
He died in our name.

It is simple, the one who died in your name, he is the one we follow here.

And he did not just die in our name, he also rose from the dead in our name, he has conquered in our name.

I found over the years that I am more aware of how I use God's name. I do say Oh my God, but with the intent that I am speaking to God. Awareness is a big piece of it, I am aware of using that word.

I use God's name, or names with care not because I am afraid that God will get me, I am aware of God's name out of respect and love.

Jesus came for us out of love. Jesus died in our name for love. Jesus saves us because of love.

Jesus calls us to follow. When he calls, he calls us out of love; we are called by name, Jesus calls your name. Will you lay down your nets and follow?

Thanks be to God.
AMEN.