

“The Name of God”

John 17:11b-19

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

In Jesus' prayer in the upper room on the night of His arrest, He prays for His disciples. He knows that they will need strength that can only come from God to deal with the events that are about to unfold. But this prayer is not just for the dark hours leading to Easter morning. This prayer is for their entire life, and certainly the argument could be made that Christ was praying for us also. I read it that way.

The words certainly apply to us. It was not just the apostles who were protected by the Name of God. We too have that assurance. It is the Name of God that makes all the difference in our lives. A name is important. If names were not important, why would we take such care to protect our personal name or family name from slander or dishonor?

Even more, if names were not important, why would we give names to the objects of our affection? But giving a name is more than just a sign that we love, or appreciate, or care about someone or something. The giving of a name establishes a relationship of dominion and possession. That is, the person who has the authority to give a name, in doing so, demonstrates that authority.

God named Adam, and He gave Eve her name. Then God gave Adam the responsibility to name all the animals because Adam and his

children were to have dominion and authority over them.

Parents give names to their children not only to limit confusion – yelling “Hey you!” doesn’t get their attention like calling their name (especially when you include their middle name in an authoritative voice). As we celebrate Mother’s Day, we all know what it means when mom uses the middle name too.

But your mother and father did not simply give you a name for clarity sake. They could have numbered you if that were the case. “Hey, number three, come over here.” Nor did they give you names simply so they could easily exercise their divinely established authority over you. The giving of a name is primarily a sign of love. You choose a name that is appropriate, has meaning, has a connection to or is a way of honoring someone – very often a relative (How many of you have a first or middle name which is also the name of one of your ancestors?) I am not the first “Martin Eden” in the family. My father’s first name, Roger, is my middle name.

Having the authority to give a name is a demonstration of that authority, and is a public proclamation that this child belongs to me. I claim this child as my own, and am proud and happy to do so. Someone who loved you gave you your name. That is something to remember as we celebrate Mother’s Day.

Likewise, when God gives His Name, that is no small event. In my devotional reading, I just finished the dedication of Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem from Second Chronicles, the emphasis of the entire ceremony was that this place would bear God’s Name. As God spoke through the prophets throughout the Old Testament, He made quite a big deal about the Temple bearing His Name.

The Lord said to Solomon: “I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that my Name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there” [II Chr. 7:16].

Jesus tells His disciples in the upper room – and His disciples in this room: You are safe from the evils of this world because you have been given the Name of the Most High. In Baptism, you were set apart by God and changed forever in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. You have been washed clean and made new.

And like that Temple built 3000 years ago in Jerusalem, God has placed His Name upon His new temples with great joy. At your Baptism, God said to you the same words spoken to Solomon: “I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that my Name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there” [II Chr. 7:16].

That Temple built by Solomon many years ago was destroyed from a physical standpoint. But when those physical walls were torn down, it was not that God had forsaken or abandoned His people. He was with them. His promise made to Solomon was still valid. As we are studying Daniel in our Sunday morning Bible class, even though the Temple is destroyed, Daniel kneels down, faces Jerusalem, and prays [Dan. 6:10] – even though he knows that because of the king’s edict that this will get him thrown into the lion’s den. It would be a greater tragedy for Daniel to forsake acknowledgement of the Name of God and hold back from praying.

When we pray, the first thing which our Lord taught us for which to pray is: “Hallowed be Thy Name.” And there is no greater tragedy that we could endure in this life than for a child of God who has been baptized in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit to forsake that Name.

And when the day comes when the temple of our physical body is destroyed, it is not that God has forsaken or abandoned us. The promise made at your Baptism remains valid even in death.

God's Temples, throughout history, have not been holy or majestic because of the type of structure they were or are. God's Temples bear importance because they are places which bear His Name.

You have been set apart by God. You belong to Him. He has authority over you. He is your Father. He has given you His Name. This is why we are to love, cherish, honor, and respect that Holy Name of God. It is what makes us who we are. It is God's Name which defines us as His people – as His family.

Rejoice in the love and protection of God's Name. My prayer for you this evening/morning is Christ's prayer in the upper room: "Holy Father, keep them in your Name, which you have given Me, that they may be one, even as we are one." Amen.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!