

That's My Name!

September 18, 2016

Luke 16:1-13

How many smart alecks have said, "That's my name! Don't wear it out!" What an interesting phrase! Names matter, even to God. But here's the difference. **God has a name, and you can't wear it out!**

Today we focus on the Second Commandment in Martin Luther's *Small Catechism*: "You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God."

Each commandment builds on the previous ones. Every commandment is shaped by the command to have no other gods. When we use God's name for our own purposes, we have turned God into an object for our advantage. When we use God's name for our own purposes, we have turned God into an idol. That idol even has a name: Mammon.

We abuse God's name when we use it to deceive people. Worse yet, we abuse God's name when we use it as a throwaway phrase. You will not hear me say "Oh, my god!" I don't even use the initials "OMG" in my electronic communications. I refuse to abuse God's name as a mere exclamation point. That habit leads us to abuse God's name in other ways as well.

But that wasn't the chief abuse that Martin Luther criticized. "The greatest abuse, however," he writes in the *Large Catechism*, "occurs in spiritual matters, which pertain to the conscience, when false preachers arise and peddle their lying nonsense as the Word of God." (372). Luther was most concerned about the Stewards who used God's Word as a way to gain wealth, power and influence.

That is equally true in our day. Preachers who peddle prosperity in place of the Gospel wrongfully use God's name. Teachers who advocate violence, hatred and division in the name of religion wrongfully use God's name. Commentators who predict the end of the world and gain power from those predictions wrongfully use God's name. Spiritual celebrities who spread false comfort among the complacent wrongfully use God's name.

It is an awesome privilege to share God's name in worship and preaching. The very Creator of the Universe tells us his name. God does that so that we can hear the good news of forgiveness and life. God tells us God's name so we can call on God in every need.

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In the *Large Catechism*, Luther puts it this way: "God at the same time gives us to understand that we are to use [God's] name properly, for it has been revealed and given to us precisely for our use and benefit." (373). Paul puts it this way in First Timothy, chapter two, verses three and four: "This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." Proclaiming that Good News is the proper use of God's name.

Martin Luther describes two sides of each commandment. The Second Commandment is a "you shall not" commandment. So Luther gives us the "you shall" side as well. Instead of abusing God's name, we shall "use that very name in every time of need to call on, pray to, praise, and give thanks to God." (*Small Catechism*, page 16).

One of the best uses of God's name is in baptism. God's name is best used to bring someone to life with Jesus.

We baptize in the *name* of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We use that name to shower on Croix William Smith the benefits of baptism—forgiveness, life and salvation.

We *name* Croix a child of God, sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever. We continue to use that sign of the cross in worship and in other places as well. When we make the sign of the cross, we remember that in baptism God has named us and claimed us as God's own. So when we make the sign of the cross, we use God's name properly.

We promise to teach Croix and all our children how to *use God's name* properly. In the *Large Catechism*, Martin Luther writes that "true honor to God's name consists of looking to it for all consolation and therefore calling on it." We honor God's name when we teach our children to keep the First Commandment. We honor God's name when we teach our children to fear, love and trust God above all things.

One of the ways to do this is with table prayers before we eat. This practice does not take place in most Christian homes. Rarely does it take place when Christians go out to eat. How can our children learn to honor God's name and depend on God for all good things if we grownups never model that behavior for them?

God's name is a precious gift of life and love. Let's use that gift as God intends.

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Let's pray...

Pastor Lowell Hennigs

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