

Sermon preached at OCC, 27 July 2025

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Open our hearts and minds as we listen to your words today, so that we may glorify you and enjoy your love now and always. Amen.

Luke 11:1-13

Hallowed Be Your Name

Holiness or sacredness is not a word that is used daily. We may use the term ‘sacredness’ to describe places like Marae, which are considered sacred by Māori communities as they play a central role in their social and spiritual lives. Unlike ‘sacredness’, the word ‘holy’ is used more for a person or God.

At some point, I read about a person who believed ‘holiness’ and ‘love’ were indispensable. Linda Kruschke – a mother, poet, and Jesus follower – commented on someone’s opinion on Facebook that the Bible as a whole speaks more of God’s holiness than of God’s love. Initially, she didn’t think much of it, but gradually it didn’t seem quite right to her. She checked the Bible to see the entry frequencies of these two words. While the word ‘holy’ or ‘holiness’ appears in the Bible 555 times, ‘love’ appears 698 times. She was convinced that God’s holiness and God’s love are inseparable. Do you agree with her? If you haven’t thought about God’s holiness much, today we have a good chance to refresh it.

Many weeks ago, we considered the first verse of the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6:9. In that, we call God the Father and heaven as the realm where the reign of God is exercised – literally everywhere. Today’s focus is on the second verse in Matthew and the first one in Luke: ‘Hallowed be your name.’ In this verse, surprisingly, we make a petition to God that God’s holy character be honoured in all creation. This raises a question: What motivates us to want such a thing?

In scripture, being holy means being set apart from the world. As such, when God says to the Israelites, “You shall be holy, for I am holy,” it means that they were set apart to be God’s chosen people. That is, God’s followers should strive to live a life that reflects God’s holiness, characterised by purity, righteousness, and separation from sin. It is a call to live in a manner distinct from the sinful ways of the world and to dedicate one’s life to God’s purposes.

However, is it a good thing to be set apart from the world? The scripture shows that the process to become God's people was hard. In Exodus 16, when Moses led Israel into the wilderness to be freed from Egyptian slavery, the people soon complained about the harsh conditions of their new life. They missed the times when they sat by the fleshpots and ate their fill of bread. Perhaps we do the same thing inadvertently, forgetting the real meaning of freedom or God as Father. In the wilderness – or in the world – God's people are set apart from the rest of the world to be holy people of God.

As such, when we pray "Hallowed be your name," we are technically asking that God's holy character be known, honoured, and reflected through us. But what does this mean?

Take one example. When Moses encountered the burning bush, which wasn't consumed by the flames at Horeb – the mountain of God – he thought it was odd and came to see it closely. God called out his name out of the bush, "Moses, Moses...Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." In the Old Testament, sandals held symbolic significance related to authority, inheritance, humility, and even mourning. The act of removing sandals was often associated with reverence and acknowledging the holiness of a place or the presence of God. Moses expressed his obeisance to God, acknowledging God's holy character – God who is in the world but still separated from it.

In today's context, our worship services, prayers, caring for the poor and the needy, or for the earth, may be our diverse expressions of "Hallowed be your name." For example, when we begin our work or day with prayer, we remove our metaphorical sandals, recognising God's holy presence in our lives.

Another is that through this verse, we can recenter our faith on God's holiness. Having faith in ourselves is often emphasised in this postmodern world, characterised by scepticism towards grand narratives and universal truths, emphasising instead the importance of individual perspectives and experiences. Since it challenges the idea of objective truth and embraces a plurality of interpretations, it often questions established institutions and power structures, such as those found in Christianity. Yet, similar to what happened to Moses, shifting our faith in ourselves to God is a big leap of faith, one that involves humbling ourselves as God's children and relinquishing our claim to ownership of life. It cultivates humility, reminding us that prayer is not about manipulating God for our plans but about surrendering to God's holy will. For

instance, when we choose to forgive someone who deeply hurt us, rather than holding onto our pride or anger, we are living out the prayer “Hallowed be your name.”

Lastly, when we pray for God’s name to be holy, we are committing ourselves to live in ways that honour and reflect God’s holiness. In Hebrew thought, God’s name (יהוה) signifies God’s very presence and action. Thus, “Hallowed be your name” is a plea that our lives do not profane but sanctify God’s presence. It calls us to integrity, holiness, and faithful witness in a world that often disregards God’s name.

OCC is trying to live by the word of God. Our community work, which involves helping the needy and underprivileged, is an expression of our living as God’s holy people. For example, our Thursday Group, bread-run, fundraising together with all other ministries not only feed bodies but also honour God’s name by serving with compassion and love. Reciting the Lord’s Prayer daily with all our hearts and minds before we begin a day invites God into our lives and allows God to lead us in building God’s kingdom on earth as well as in heaven.

Scholars suggest that the difference between the two versions of the Lord’s Prayer found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke likely stems from the various ways prayer evolved in the earliest churches’ worship. Both versions offer corporate petitions, consistently speaking in the first-person plural, reminding us that Jesus envisages communities together in prayer as much as solitary individuals. We remember that it was the disciples as a group who came to Jesus with their request, “Lord, teach us to pray.”

It remains a request people make to this day, still finding it challenging to find the right words and silences in their prayer life. With the Lord’s Prayer, our prayers need never be wordless. Whenever we recite it, this verse “Hallowed be your name” lifts our focus from earthly concerns to God and God’s purpose by which we are here and now. In doing so, we can continue to live as God’s chosen people, who are separated from the world but in the world to extend the love of God that makes God holy of holies. May God’s name be hallowed forever and ever. Amen.