

June 27, 2021
The 5th Sunday after Pentecost

“Yes!”

Grace, mercy and peace, from God our Father, from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

Well as we go into our last sermon on the holiness of God, I'm going to begin this sermon a little different than the previous ones. I'm not going to walk through where we've been in the last three sermons because, well, you might actually have a question coming out of those last three sermons. What exactly is meant by holy? To better understand it, I'd like to share something with you from my life.

I will never forget the summer of 1971. We went on a family vacation, which was normal, but what we did this particular year was we reversed the direction of everything. We went to Yosemite first, which was normally our last place to go. From there we proceeded north to Lake Tahoe where we met and spent time with my mother's aunt who lived there. From there we traveled south down the eastern side of the Sierra to Mammoth Lakes where we spent a week at Twin Lakes. And from there we headed south to that little town of Bishop, the mule capital of the world. We went there for only one day staying at the Shoulder Lane Trailer Park. We did that so we could go to church on Sunday at Grace Lutheran Church in Bishop. At that time there was an interim pastor, Pastor Shatt who was filling in. The church has gone through quite a tremendous split, and it had been ugly. They had just called a new pastor and he had turned them down the night before the service. And ironically when Pastor Shatt looked out in the congregation and saw my dad and his family sitting there, he joked about how they had taken my father's name in vain. Because he could have been on the call list, and they hadn't gone with him. Well after the service, my dad met with Pastor Shatt and with several of the elders. My older brother John and I we were left to our own imagination of what to do. So, we explored this church, and we had a tremendously fun time doing it. We found all sorts of stuff that had been stored away in nooks and crannies. But when church was over, we packed into the family station wagon, trailer attached and we headed down to our home, our new home in Southern California.

We had moved from Downey to the neighboring community of Bellflower into a home that was about three blocks from the very first Kaiser hospital. We had to move because the state of California had bought our home, because it was right in the path of the Century Freeway. We came home from vacation, moved into this new home, literally new. And dad was quite excited about this new home because well he got it before they actually had finished it. He told them don't worry about the landscaping, don't worry about any of that, I'll take care of it. Which meant he was going to give his boys to some work to do.

And so, it was in August that I was given the choice of completely clearing the backyard of all vegetation, dig it all out because that's where we were going to put are 15 foot Doughboy Pool. And it was while I was digging out that grass, those weeds, it was about up time me good evening, that my brother John came out and said, 'you might as well stop.' I looked at him and said 'why?' Dad got a call to be the pastor in Bishop. And not long after, dad came and told me, 'I have to call, we need to pray about this.' My brothers and I, we considered it a done deal. If God was calling us to Vacationland, Bishop where we used to vacation, then obviously dad was supposed to take the call and we were supposed to go. He took the call, we moved to Bishop.

I remember pulling into town on US highway 395, and as we did there's a sign off to the right that exists to this day that says, Vacationland, Bishop welcomes you. And I was so excited about our new home in a vacationland! And then I went to school, and suddenly I realized Vacationland Bishop didn't welcome me. I was tall for my age, big for my age, I was also an invalid. I had an injured knee, and I was unable to participate in PE or any sports. It had been that way for almost a year and would continue for almost six months. And so I was brutally teased, picked on, I was beaten on, literally. And it was just not fun.

If it wasn't for that old 15 foot Terry trailer we had taken on vacation for almost every year that I could remember, I don't know if I would have made it. Because you see my dad had converted the back part of that trailer from one bed to two beds. He put in an upper bunk that had a double sized bed on it, a very low ceiling. It was almost like in a cave or cavern. And I knew where the spare key to the trailer was. And after having a bad day at school, I would go outside, go to that trailer, climb up in that bunk and escape from it all. No one

could see me. No one knew where I was. It was a quiet, comfortable, little place, set apart from everyone where I took refuge. And that was my holy space. You see holy means totally separate, totally away from everything and everybody. Totally different from all others. And we hear of people having their holy space, or maybe their holy time, or as a country we have holy days, holidays. They are different days, there set apart for memory or remembering, or for honoring.

And so, this is the first meaning of holy. It is to separate; literally, totally separate. And then the second half is the part we usually get hung up on which refers to personal righteousness. But, you see, that righteousness is what actually causes the separation. Because we live in an unrighteous world. But when it comes to God, we now look at this word holy and we ask ourselves, how important, how significant is it that God is holy?

And so over the last couple of weeks, we've heard that was quite significant because God refers to Himself as holy, saying, "I am holy" and as a result of that He gives us the call that we are to be holy as He is holy. And as we've seen in the last week, it is traumatic to find yourself the presence of the holy God because we are unholy. And when we looked at God and His Holiness, all in all, we should just stand in awe with our mouth open and agape saying just, 'that is God.' But in this final sermon on holiness, we are really going to focus now on the significance of God being holy. And I am going to go to our gospel found in Matthew chapter 6 this morning which is a part of the Sermon on the Mount.

As I mentioned a couple weeks ago, the first part of the Sermon on the Mount, chapter 5, verses 1 through 12 are the blessed oracles where Jesus says, 'blessed are the peacemakers, blessed are the poor in spirit.' Right after that in verses 13 and 16 of chapter five, we hear the beginning of our call. We are to be the salt of the earth. We are to be a light in the darkness. So, if we are the ones who are blessed because of who we are; we are going to be that salt, we're to be the light, we are separate from others. We bring taste, we bring a light in the darkness. From there, as we saw last week Jesus just went right into the law, that He is the fulfillment of the Law, and He needs to fulfill the Law on our behalf, because not a dot, not an iota of the Law will pass away.

Then beginning with chapter 5:21, He begins to redefine the Law. It's no longer, 'you shall not murder,' but you're not supposed to hate, you're not supposed to commit adultery, becomes don't even look with lust. You shall not steal; don't even think of wanting what somebody else has. Actually, Jesus ramps the Law way up. Last week we saw how God in the Old Testament gave the Law, but then He reduced the number of capital offenses that we're punishable here on earth. He showed mercy. Jesus takes the one he ramps it up, to where it is absolutely impossible. Following that, with chapter six He now starts talking about being righteous and humble and being set apart for God.

Then He teaches us how to pray the Lord's prayer. I also want you to think about what was just read. He also tells us that prayer is to be holy. He tells us, but when you pray, go into your room, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is in secret. Do not heap up empty phrases as the Pharisees and the Scribes do. We are to separate ourselves from this world, and from the distractions of this world, and be totally focused on God because we are speaking to Almighty God, Creator of heaven and earth. And how were we to pray? "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be thy name." Now we certainly have a formal address there. Our Father. There are theologians who argue about the next part. Is it still a part of the address, or is it the first petition of the Lord's prayer? You might say, 'well pastor Matt obviously, it is the first petition because if it's a part of the formal address, Jesus would have told us to pray our Father who art in heaven, holy is your name, instead of hallowed or holy be your name. But as soon as we look at that and go 'yeah, that's the first petition;' we also realize that making it the very first petition, that the very first thing that we come to God in prayer about; is of extreme importance because it's recognizing that our Father in heaven is holy, and deserves to be called holy, and that we are therefore to keep it holy, keep it separate keep it special.

How important is this? How separate, how special? Let's go back to the 10 commandments. You know how they begin; you shall have no other gods before me and you shall make no graven image of, bow down before it. So, the first thing is, we are to separate God from all other gods because He is God and there's nothing that comes before Him. And don't even dare make graven images and worship something else other than the Holy God. But what comes right after that? "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain."

He is the Holy One, and you cherish His name. His name is holy. It is separate from all other names, from all other gods, from all other titles, from all other phrases. He is the living God, creator of heaven and earth, and Redeemer of our souls! Our call is to be holy, as our God is holy, to separate ourselves from this world.

And you might say, 'Pastor, how?' 'What are the steps we take? That's where we go to Romans chapter 12, verse 2 where Saint Paul tells us, 'be separate, be holy, not conforming to the patterns of this world.' That's why we had that as our responsive reading this morning. There is such a call in the world today to go with the crowd, be woke. No, the Bible tells us do not conform to the ways of this world. Instead, be holy, be separate. In our New Testament reading this morning we hear Peter telling us basically, embrace being separate. Embrace being who we are and the purpose we have from God. Think of what Peter says, 'you are a chosen race!' This is not based on skin color, but it is based on the white robe of righteousness that all who put their faith, hope and trust in Christ are given by God. We are a holy, chosen, race. God chose us, He redeemed us, He made us His own.

We are not white, black, Asian, Hispanic! No, we are Christian, and we are a royal priesthood. So, be the royal priesthood. Separate yourself to be the royal priesthood. What does the priest do? As we have seen it over the last two weeks, he is the one who takes man's needs and concerns to God. This is where that prayer, holy prayer comes in. But also, the priest was to preserve knowledge. We are to preserve the knowledge of our holy God and His holy Word. We are a holy nation, so be the holy nation. A nation that is set apart for His will. A people set apart, as Peter says, to declare His holy deeds. We are to embrace who we are, be that royal priesthood, be the chosen race, be the holy nation, and be His possession.

When He redeemed us through the blood of Jesus, He bought us back, He made us His own. The reality is, God is holy! He is separate from all other gods, all other beings, all everything. He has also separated Himself to save His creation. And He has done it. So we are, as Peter says, to proclaim His excellence, His excellent deeds. He who has called us out of the darkness and into His marvelous light, and since He and He only has done this, we are to keep His Name holy. We don't mingle it with any others. He alone is God. This idea that there's many pathways and many names. No, there is the one

holy God! We keep it holy by never using it recklessly, but using God's name with all the reverence, with all the respect, and with all the awe that it deserves, that He deserves. And we are to cherish His Name because it is His Name that saves, and it is His Name by which we are known, Christian, Christlike. Be holy and set your God and His Name apart as holy.

In His Name, Amen!