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Pentecost XVIII & Proper 21
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Text: Philippians 2:1 – 18
Title: What's In A Name?

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Sometimes the Lord God puts things in front of us in unexpected ways. Take today's epistle reading from Philippians 2 as an example. Here Paul gives us a wonderful proclamation about the name of Jesus that I'll talk about a bit later this morning. The unexpected part is how this reading overlapped with our Life-Light worship study from this past week. For those of you who weren't there, we took a detailed look at how God identifies Himself in His Word, from the Divine Name of Yahweh or I AM to the name of the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We looked specifically at the verses from Philippians 2 that declare how our worship is tied directly to the name of Jesus which will inspire "...every knee to bow."

To our modern, American ears, it's a strange way to think about a name. In our society our names don't mean very much beyond a way to identify one another. Our last name makes us part of a specific family, and we can often trace it back in time to see where our ancestors come from. Some last names identify an old profession that our families likely worked in, such as Smith or Miller. But the idea that a person's name carries a specific meaning like it did in biblical times is mostly lost on us today.

So is a name really all that important? Well, when it comes to His own name, the Lord says that it is very important. Remember the Second Commandment? "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain." After they returned from exile sometime around 538BC, the Jews were so afraid of violating this commandment that by the time of Jesus, they had even made a secondary law that just to mention God's proper name, Yahweh, carried a severe penalty. Today's Jews still don't

Speak the name of Yahweh in their temples or synagogues because they are afraid of violating these laws. They say a substitute name, Adonai, instead.

Today the name of Yahweh isn't used very much. Instead we more typically refer to God by the names of each person of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That's the way that the Christian church commonly refers to Him because that's how Jesus has revealed Him to us. It's the name that we have been baptized into and that we have been called to live by, and when we do, we glorify the Lord and particularly His name.

Of course, our sinful self doesn't care at all about giving glory to the name of God. It seems like such a simple thing to do, especially when you listen to those who say that Christianity is primarily about following the Ten Commandments. I guess it would be simple if the Commandments could be kept simply by their surface meanings or the letter of the Law.

Jesus, however, tells us that there is more to God's Law than what is simply stated on the surface. Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:27 – 28, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart." In this same portion of Matthew, Jesus also tells us that keeping the commandment not to murder isn't any easier, and there is much more to the other Commandments as well. Just reread what Martin Luther writes about the Ten Commandments in his Small Catechism.

Dr. Luther was simply condensing what he found throughout the rest of the Scriptures. We only need to look at the first four verses of today's Epistle reading to see that. "So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count

others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

So, how have you been doing? Have you been “in full accord” or agreement with your fellow Christians here? Have you been of one mind? Have you done anything out of rivalry or conceit either among your family here at church or among your friends, family, and neighbors?

How about examining yourself from the other side? After all, Paul doesn’t just tell the Philippians to not do certain things, but he tells them what they should be doing as well. Remember, you confess to God that you sin by what you have done, and by what you have left undone. And Paul tells you that the Lord would have you be humble enough to put someone else’s interests before your own. Not only are you to do that, but you are to consider their interests to be more important than your own. The Lord will certainly be pleased with how you have glorified His name by living with others, won’t He? Because you always put the needs of your neighbor first, right?

Of course, there is more to today’s epistle reading from Philippians. You might be thinking, “More!? I’m in enough trouble with God and His Law already!” But listen to the rest of these verses again, “Have this in mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

There is such great hope in those words! First, Jesus did for you what you couldn't do on your own because of your sinful nature. He placed Himself in a position of ultimate and perfect humility. He is God! But for you He put His power and authority aside, and while He walked this earth He didn't even attempt to regain that position or that power even when the devil tempted Him to do it! He placed everyone, including you and you and you, ahead of Himself, and He became a man and a servant of others.

But He didn't stop His work there. Jesus did not come into this world as a humble human being just to be an example of how to live, but He came to live in the way that you could not, perfectly and without sin. Then, He humbled Himself even further to pay the penalty that you owed for your sin. God the Son, obediently went to His death, suffering death on a cross for you, and because He humbled Himself, God the Father exalted Him and the very name of Jesus, to be above every name. His is a name that is respected and honored in heaven and on earth.

It is a name that has been placed on you as well. Who do you belong to? Jesus Christ. When did He claim you as His own? At your Baptism. You became His when you were baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. On that day, He claimed you as His own child, and made your name a part of His family for all eternity. Before the pastor poured water over your head, your parents were asked how you were to be named, and then your name was presented to the Lord. After the water was poured, there was another name given to you to help in your identity, the name of Christian.

That name tells you that you have no need to worry about your sins. They are forgiven because the name of Jesus has been added to yours, and when the Father looks at you, He doesn't see the sins that you have committed. He sees Jesus and He forgives you for the sake of His Son.

Because of that forgiveness, His forgiveness, there is now nothing that you *must* do. You are completely free in the forgiveness that He has bought for you. There is however, many

things that you are given the *privilege* of doing, and that's everything that I mentioned before. In short, you *get* to live in a humble way that will glorify the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and honor your Lord's name.

You are given the joy of humbling yourself at the name of Jesus. That's why it's fitting to bow when the Trinity is mentioned in the service. That's why kneeling has long been a part of Christian worship, especially when receiving Communion. It is not that you must do these things, but you get to do them as a sign of your humility, faithfulness, and devotion to your Lord.

In addition to these things, we show our love for our Lord by serving others. He doesn't need the things that we give and do, but when we give to others and when we serve them in His name, then we are really doing that service for the Lord. We don't serve to be *like* Him; we serve others to serve Him. The Father doesn't need you to be a "little Jesus" running around here in the world. One Jesus is enough. The Father calls you to be the "you" that He created you to be, and to live the life of good works that He has prepared in advance just for you to do with the unique gifts and talents that He has blessed you with.

There will be times that you fail. You can count on that because you're still a sinful human. But those sins are forgiven by the blood shed on the cross. There is nothing that we can do or not do or say that He will not forgive because He has promised that Jesus' sacrifice was enough for all. And He always keeps His promises. His good name depends on it. Amen. In the *name* of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.