

Hallowed Be Thy Name
Luke 11:1-4
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The Lord's Prayer is most familiar to us from the version in the Gospel of Matthew. Today, we hear Luke's version.

Luke 11:1-4

He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples."

He said to them, "When you pray, say:
Father, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
Give us each day our daily bread.
And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.
And do not bring us to the time of trial."

For the Word of God in scripture,
For the Word of God among us,
For the Word of God within us,
Thanks be to God.

To dig more deeply into the phrase "Hallowed be your name," we are going to begin in what you might consider to be a strange place—we are going digging in dirt, to look for fungi.

According to naturalist David George Haskell in his book *The Forest Unseen*, "Fungal threads cover most of the soil like a subterranean spiderweb." "A thimbleful of soil may contain a hundred feet of" fungal threads, known as hyphae.

What is all that fungus doing there? In a forest, the fungus is married to the trees. Listen to this description:

The fungus and the [tree] root greet each other with chemical signals and, if the salutation goes smoothly, the fungus extends its hyphae in readiness for an embrace. In some cases, the plant responds by growing tiny rootlets for the fungi to colonize. In others, the plant allows the fungus to penetrate the root's cell walls and spread the hyphae into the interior of the cells. Once inside, the hyphae divide into fingers, forming a miniature rootlike network within the cells of the root.

Haskell then remarks at how strange this seems.

This arrangement looks pathological. I would be a sick man if my cells were infested with fungi in this way. But the ability of hyphae to penetrate plant cells is put to healthy use in this marriage with roots. The plant supplies the fungus with sugars and other complex molecules; the fungus reciprocates with a flow of minerals, particularly phosphates. This union builds on the strengths of the two kingdoms: plants can create sugars from air and sunlight; fungi can mine minerals from the soil's tiny crevices.

Recent science is leading to the conclusion that individuality is an illusion in plant communities, as the rhizosphere makes such intimate connections. We may need to think of a forest as an organism.

Haskell writes, "We are explorers standing at the edge of a dark jungle, peering at the strange shapes in the soil's interior, naming a handful of the most obvious novelties but understanding little."

But even from our limited knowledge of the ground that supports life on this planet, we can draw some conclusions. Haskell says,

The more we learn about the life of the soil, the more apt our language's symbols become: "roots," "groundedness." These words reflect not only a physical connection to place but reciprocity with the environment, mutual dependence with other members of the community, and the positive effects of roots on the rest of their home. All these relationships are embedded in a history so deep that individuality has started to dissolve and uprootedness is impossible.

In my office hangs a painting by Joyce Wilson of the roots of trees deep in the ground, connecting around rocks. I saw that painting once when I visited her studio and Michael bought it for me for my birthday that year. I wanted it, not just because I liked it visually, but because of its rich theological imagery.

How are tree roots and dirt "rich theological imagery" you ask?

Listen to these words of the medieval mystic Meister Eckhart:

Now know, all our perfection and our holiness rests in this: that a person must penetrate and transcend everything created and temporal and all being and go into the ground that has no ground. We pray our dear Lord God that we may become one and indwelling, and may God help us into the same ground. Amen.

Eckhart uses the ground as a rich metaphor to explain our relationship with God. God is the ground of our being, and we sink our roots deep into the mysterious otherness of God, where, much like the tree roots, we are nurtured and sustained. God's ground is our ground and together we are fused. Eckhart would have reveled in the discoveries of modern biology.

As I've moved fully into middle age I have found that gardening is one of my delights. Here at the church I have a vegetable plot in our community garden and at home I have

cultivated flower and herb beds. My domestic chores now flow to the rhythm of the seasonal cycles of growth.

When I garden I rarely wear gloves. I like to get my hands really dirty. That may be a little bit of the kid still a part of me, but I've also read that there are actual health benefits, including for fighting depression and anxiety, in getting one's hands dirty.

It's also because I'm a fan of Meister Eckhart's image of our relationship to God, getting my hands dirty feels like a form of prayer and communion.

The twentieth-century Russian theologian Sergius Bulgakov uses a similar imagery to Eckhart's. He wrote, "The roots of a person's being are submerged in the bottomless ocean of divine life and get their nourishment from this life."

For Bulgakov this nourishment of our roots in divine being is closely associated with prayer. "Prayer is a form of direct synergism, a living meeting of God and man." "In prayer . . . human beings are permeated with life in God."

As I read those words, I'm drawn back to the description of the tree roots and the fungus entangling and permeating one another and passing nourishment back and forth. Where deep histories and intimate connections of mutual dependence dissolve individuality. In prayer, the roots of our being entangle with the living God, and we are permeated with the divine life and energy. Sounds a little bit like communion as well.

What nourishment do we then draw from this ground of our being, from the Holy God who is the Source of our life?

Timothy Bradshaw answers, "Prayer counteracts the corrosive fear and worry common throughout our culture, by steady contemplation of the source of all Being."

He explains how this contemplation works:

This orientation of the self to holy Being, in praying 'hallowed be your name,' opens it up afresh, effectively dispensing with the attitudes of cynicism and despair which afflict [us]. . . . To pray in this regard, sinking one's will again into the divine life, deliberately giving up one's idols, refocusing on the generous love and holiness of God, is to go more deeply into the springs of trust and honesty, away from hardness of heart and hiddenness.

To experience the Holy God is to have "an invigorating encounter and challenge" he writes.

Prayer does something to us. It nourishes and sustains us with the divine life, so that we might joyfully and wonderfully live.

This week in my reading I followed rabbits down various holes, one of which led to reviewing the writings on prayer and holiness of the great Puritan theologian Jonathan Edwards. According to Edwards, when we pray "Hallowed be thy name," clearly we are not informing God of anything. We are instead "preparing us to receive the blessings we ask." According to Edwards, we are affecting our own hearts.

He writes that “true religion, or holiness of heart, lies very much in the affection of the heart.” And so “True saints have their minds . . . inexpressibly pleased and delighted with the sweet ideas of the glorious and amiable nature of the things of God. . . . It is the joy of their joy . . . a ravishing entertainment . . . in the view of the beautiful and delightful nature of divine things.”

To declare God’s holiness is to declare God’s worthiness, God’s beauty, God’s glory. It is to experience awe and wonder at the source and renewal of our life. And this experience of awe and wonder draws us forward into gratitude, praise, and joy.

Edwards declared, “The Holy [Spirit] being the love and joy of God is [God’s] beauty and happiness, and it is in our partaking of the same Holy Spirit that our communion with God consists.”

When we encounter the Holy God in prayer, we experience beauty and joy, and these work upon our affections, healing our pain and suffering, drawing us into communion, and giving us happiness.

To declare that God is holy is to claim that God is unique and transcendent. And yet, we experience God not as remote and set apart but as the very source of our life and wonder and joy.

When we pray, we enter into relationship with a loving and holy God. Praying is like sending our roots into the soil to be nourished. In that ground we grow intimate connections, and individuality begins to dissolve into communion. In that ground we experience beauty and joy that transform us.

God is not out there, remote and distant. God is deep in us, the source of our life, the breath of our breath, the joy of our joy.

So, let us pray as Jesus taught, “Hallowed be thy name.”