

Home Worship for October 2018 – Gwen Hardy

7th October “**I have called you by name**” Isaiah 43 v 1

Everything has a name, it is how we relate to everything about us. As we look around we have general names for what we see - trees, flowers buildings etc. - then we have particular names to describe them further. The word buttercup perfectly describes the shape and colour of that flower. In Genesis God named the different aspects of the world as they were created, “God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night”. It would be impossible to function and interact in life if nothing and no one had a name. Our own name identifies us and sets us in context. Friends and family know us by our Christian name and our surname tells what family we are connected to and is used for more formal communications, but it does not necessarily describe us. In the Bible names have much more meaning.

The Bible has many names for the Lord and each tells us something about him – JESUS means God **saves**, IMMANUEL God **with us**, CHRIST the **anointed**, THE LION of JUDAH telling us of his **strength** and THE LAMB of GOD his **gentleness**, PRINCE of **PEACE**, and ALPHA and OMEGA meaning **first and last**. Let us go to the early part of the Old Testament where we hear about the name Moses was told to use for God, when he went to Pharaoh to free the Israelites from Egypt. Please read Exodus 3 v 7-15

‘I am’ doesn’t sound like a proper name, but then the name for God, being the creator of the world, would have to be unique, unlike any other name. Arcana Caelestia 6880 gives an explanation of this name:

‘I am who I am’ means the Being and the Coming into being of all things throughout creation. This is clear from the fact that ‘I am’ means to have Being and since He alone is the source of all being ‘I am’ is used as a name.

God as the source of all life is coming into being, or coming into expression, throughout all creation. We only have to look at the world of nature in all its variety, and the many wonders of the universe to see that. How any scientist could deny the existence of God is beyond me. We as human *beings* are part of creation. The Lord gives his life freely and we are given the choice as to how we use and express it. Our natural name is not deeply significant, as in the bible, but over the course of life our thoughts and actions are forming a description of who we really are, giving us a spiritual name. The Lord is always wanting to come into *being* in new ways. Each person is an individual into whom He can come in a unique way. He wants to call out all that is good and true. Let us be open to receive his call and ‘create a name for ourselves’, or more importantly for The Lord.

Please read Isaiah 43 v 1-7

Prayer Dear Lord we thank you for the gift of life with its many blessings and opportunities. May we use your life wisely and be truly named by you. Amen

October 14th “**I am the bread of life**” John 6 v 35

The main focus of John’s gospel seems to be on who Jesus really was and the purpose of his life. Jesus said seven specific things about himself, sometimes known as the seven ‘I am’ sayings, which state the different aspects of God that he came to live and express. Today we are thinking about the first, and the foundation for the others, **‘I am the bread of life’**. Read John 6 v 16-35

At this point Jesus’ ministry is gaining momentum and he is beginning to draw the crowds. He has been performing ‘signs’ (as John calls them), turning water into wine and healing the sick, and the more recent sign of feeding five thousand people with five loaves and two fishes.

Jesus' whole ministry was aimed at raising the people's thoughts from earth to heaven, from the natural to the spiritual. He talked to Nicodemus of being born again, and to the Samaritan woman at the well, of living water welling up to eternal life. The crowd came to Jesus after being fed on the hillside and what follows is a conversation about bread. Jesus said, **"Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life"** (v27), but they were slow to get the point. He then brings about a shift in the conversation saying, **"The bread of God is HE who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world"** (v33). No longer is bread a thing - it becomes a person, HE! He continues by saying, **"I am the bread of life,"** and when he said this he used that name that Moses was told to use as God's name, Ego eimi **I, I am**. The people would have been shocked. Jesus pushes the point home further. Read John 6 v 46-58

Bread/food is essential to life, without it we die, and spiritually the same applies. For our lives to have any true spirit in them they need the basic food of goodness and love. These two words encompass so many beautiful qualities: kindness, compassion, friendship, forgiveness, and so much more, all displayed by our Lord in his life. This was his purpose: to be a living expression of love. He is the true source of all life, natural and spiritual, and to get it we need to ask for and truly desire the spiritual food of love that he offers. Jesus says, **"Ask and it will be given you"** (Luke 11:9) and **"I am the bread of life"** and he goes on to say **"I am the LIVING bread"** (John 6:51). To me this brings it right out of history. The use of the word LIVING gives a sense of the present day and a feeling of continuity.

Just as the Israelites were given manna day by day on their journey, so the food Jesus offers us is continuous throughout life. But there were conditions: the bread had to be gathered. Each day we must gather our spiritual food. This comes in many different ways. We may get inspiration and encouragement from someone we come into contact with, or from something we see, or something we read, especially when reading the Word of God.

In this passage Jesus says **"Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man... you have no life in you"** (v53). This was a hard saying for the people of that time when human sacrifice was still practised, but of course that was not his meaning. We are being asked to take Jesus' goodness right into us, to really digest it and make it a part of our life; then joined with the life-blood of his truth we may go out and share it with others.

Prayer Dear Lord Jesus we thank you for our daily bread. May we always look to you for our spiritual nourishment. Amen

October 21st "I am the light of the world"

Please read John 1 v 1-14, John 8 v 12 & John 9 v1-6

We take the daylight for granted. Whatever else, we know the sun will rise each morning. Even on an overcast day the light of the sun will penetrate and a new day will begin. We know earthly life cannot exist without light: nothing could grow and no one could live. Another thing we take for granted is the cycle of the seasons, as we rotate around the sun we experience its light and heat in varying degrees and we plan our lives accordingly. Everyone knows these simple facts, yet on a spiritual level we may often remain ignorant. Do we trust the Lord in his love and wisdom to enlighten our minds, as confidently as we trust the rising of the sun each morning? If we did, we would not fret or worry or doubt as much as we do.

The opening sentences of John's gospel refer to God as 'the Word', a strange title one would think. It comes from the Greek word *logos* meaning **speech**. Another meaning of *logos* was **reason**, and the scholars of the day used this term for the underlying reason for everything, in other words the Creator God.

Jesus declared himself to be the '**light of the world**' fulfilling what John had said about him. He demonstrated this in his life on earth with his teachings, bringing light, **understanding** to the people, and even down to the physical level when he healed the blind and sick. These correspond to the many forms of spiritual blindness and sickness that they, and we, experience.

Jesus also said an amazing thing in the Sermon on the Mount, "*You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*" (Matt 5:14-16)

Those disciples and followers of Jesus may have wondered what light they had and we may wonder the same, but we have all been created with the ability to receive and shine out the light of God's truth in a unique way. His creation is not complete without our contribution, whatever it may be. Our light may not only be through words - whatever flows out from us is a form of speech or expression. It may be a certain atmosphere we create, or it may be some talent we have been given. There is a prayer/song often attributed to a sixteenth century Carmelite nun, Teresa of Avila:

"Christ has no body now on earth but yours; no hands but yours; no feet but yours; yours are eyes through which to look with Christ's compassion on the world; yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good, and yours are the hands with which he is to bless us now."

Prayer Dear Lord, you are the light of the world, the one dependable thing in our lives. Help us to trust your guiding light of love and wisdom, as much as we trust the rising sun each day. May it shine ever more brightly on and through us all. Amen

October 28th "Hallowed be thy name" Please read Matthew 6 v 5-14
Most church services include the reciting of the Lord's Prayer, the prayer that Jesus taught us. It is so familiar to us that we must be careful to pay attention to the words we say. The writings of our church say '*more things are in it, in proportion as man's thought is more opened towards heaven.*'
Swedenborg said, "*As often as I have recited the Lord's Prayer I have had the plain feeling of being raised towards the Lord..... At these times my ideas were open and communication with some communities in heaven was consequently established.*"
Read further from *Arcana Caelestia* 6476

The prayer starts '**Our Father, who art in the heavens.**' This is the foundation for the whole prayer. It holds in essence all that follows. At the outset the prayer is addressed to '**Our Father**', which immediately puts us in a humble and child like attitude towards God as our father. This is followed by the words '**hallowed be thy name**'. To hallow is to make sacred or holy, or to revere. As we have seen, in spiritual terms a person's name describes their quality, so when these words are recited earnestly they are an acknowledgement of the many aspects of the Lord's wonderful qualities of love and wisdom, and our desire to revere or respect them in our lives.

The Lord's name is written on the whole of the natural world in all its beauty, order, and variety, and we *hallow* it when we love and care for it. When we pray '**hallowed be thy name**', we commit ourselves anew to preserving this wonderful planet in every way we can.

Just as precious minerals can be found within the fabric of the earth, so is God's love and wisdom to be found within the letter of the Word. In a New Church service of worship an open copy of the inspired Word of God is to be seen on the altar, a symbol of respect and honour for all it contains. But it is only a symbol, and we only truly *hallow* it when we read and treasure it, and endeavour to live by the truths we learn.

As we saw at the beginning of the month God has many names, but the name most familiar to us as Christians is **Jesus**. Mary was told before his conception, that he should be called **Jesus**, which means **God saves**. God came on earth in human form as Jesus, the 'Word made flesh', a living example of all those qualities of love and wisdom written throughout the Old Testament, bringing them even closer to affect us in heart and mind. When we follow his example and embody his teachings we will truly *hallow* his name and he will truly be our **Saviour**.

Those of us who no longer have a New Church to attend may miss the singing of hymns, but many of the words are still imprinted on our minds. The following comes to mind:

*At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,
every tongue confess him King of glory now;
tis his own commandment we should call him Lord,
who from the beginning was the mighty Word.*

Prayer 'Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake.' Amen Psalm 115 v1