

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 8/7/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

ONE AT ONE – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, August 8 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for all who are preparing to begin or return to school this Fall. Remember students, teachers, aides, and administrators. Pray for respect for each other, a renewed commitment for teaching, learning, and mentoring, and ask that all in schools be kept safe throughout the year.*

The first Commandment instructs us to place GOD above all other things, that nothing should be more important to us than honoring GOD and doing GOD'S will. The second Commandment helps us with that honoring of GOD by telling us to "not take the LORD'S name in vain." The word "vain" can mean "empty," "nothing," "worthless," or "to no good purpose." This means that we are not to use the name of GOD in a way that is wicked, worthless, or for wrong purposes. Basically, we are not to misuse GOD'S name, though I suppose there could be debate about what misusing the name might be.

In the society in which JESUS lived, there was tremendous respect for the name of GOD and there are still Jews and others today who seek to observe this practice. In JESUS' time, this concern for honoring GOD'S name was so great that people would not even say it. When reading the scriptures out loud in worship, many Jews simply pause and then skip over the name rather than speaking it. Some people today will write G-D so as to avoid dishonoring the name. Yahweh is considered the actual name of GOD, translated as "I AM," and "Jehovah" is another way of rendering that name. Another way that people in JESUS' day would avoid misusing GOD'S name would be to substitute "heaven" for the word "GOD." That's why JESUS would often say, "the Kingdom of Heaven," as recorded in Matthew and as we often hear in the gospel readings this year. Mark and Luke document JESUS words as "the Kingdom of GOD," but Matthew, who is writing primarily to Jews, follows the practice, and writes, "the Kingdom of Heaven."

We don't know whether JESUS really said, "the Kingdom of GOD," as recorded particularly by Mark who actually heard HIM speak, or "the Kingdom of Heaven," as in the Gospel of Matthew, who was one of JESUS' disciples, and perhaps changed it to honor the convention of not saying the name. But we do know that JESUS often encouraged us to think of and call GOD "FATHER," as another suitable substitution for the name of GOD. In the Garden of Gethsemane, when JESUS was praying, HE began by saying, "ABBA, FATHER." "Abba" is a Hebrew word for "father." And in the LORD'S Prayer, JESUS also uses the word "FATHER" for GOD. FATHER is not always a good substitution for those who were mistreated or abused by their earthly fathers. But it may be that JESUS offered "FATHER" as an acceptable way of naming GOD without using the name of GOD.

However, you choose to name GOD, it is important to do so in way that shows reverence and honor to GOD. Today many say the name of GOD without much thought to the context or the way in which they are using it. Consciously thinking about our own use of the name of our CREATOR not only shows honor for GOD, but also can help us to grow in our commitment to put GOD first and above all other things.

In CHRIST'S love,
Pastor Jeffrey