



Calvary Presbyterian Church
Sunday, JUNE 25, 2023

A Prayer for Undivided Hearts:
Reflections on Psalm 86
Rev. Eyde Mabanglo

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 86:1-10, 16-17 (NLT)

A prayer of David.

¹Bend down, O LORD, and hear my prayer;
answer me, for I need your help.

²Protect me, for I am devoted to you.

Save me, for I serve you and trust you. You are my God.

³Be merciful to me, O Lord, for I am calling on you constantly.

⁴Give me happiness, O Lord, for I give myself to you.

⁵O Lord, you are so good, so ready to forgive, so full of unfailing love for all who ask for your help.

⁶Listen closely to my prayer, O Lord; hear my urgent cry.

⁷I will call to you whenever I'm in trouble, and you will answer me.

⁸No pagan god is like you, O Lord. None can do what you do!

⁹All the nations you made will come and bow before you, Lord;
they will praise your holy name.

¹⁰For you are great and perform wonderful deeds. You alone are God.

¹⁶Look down and have mercy on me.

Give your strength to your servant; save me, the son of your servant.

¹⁷Send me a sign of your favor.

Then those who hate me will be put to shame, for you, O LORD, help and comfort me.

SERMON

Today's psalm is a prayer attributed to David.

And as with most prayers, the beginning statement includes some sort of name or title for God. David starts with God's divine name...LORD—all caps in traditional English translations, meaning: I AM or HE IS or YOU ARE—the one who was, is and will be...The God who simply is....God.

How do you address God? When you say LORD are you calling God by name? Or are you saying simply *master or shepherd* or one who oversees my life by my choice or my commitment. Or do you avoid the word Lord because it is triggering for you or if not for you for someone you care about...so you address God differently...meaningful, but differently.

LORD the personal name of Isarel's God (is introduced to us in Exodus 3) God tells Moses, that his name is ehyeh (I AM/I WILL BE)...the God who simply IS!

So Moses, uses the name YHWH...**he will be**

The NAME for the LORD appears 6,500 times in our scriptures

In order to honor the divine name of God...YHWH, scholars would read instead the word ADONAI (which simply means lord or master). So, when scripture was translated into ENGLISH, scholars would write the word LORD (in all caps) for the names of God YHWH.

AND Jewish scribes who were tasked with translating Hebrew to English, came up with a visual reminder to make sure people said ADONAI when reading God's name.

They would use the consonants YHWH and insert the vowels from the word AdOnAi which then became Yahowah (which is a totally made up name). This word eventually...became the word JEHOVAH that some Christian sects still use to refer to God's name YHWH.

This may be insightful or needlessly confusing, but essentially:

- LORD (ALL CAPS) is the divine name of God
- Lord refers to the title or role of adon (master, shepherd, Lord of lords, king, ruler, and perhaps husband)
- God is often from Elohim in Hebrew

All these names show up in this Psalm, but this is a little lost on us as we read aloud from various English translations.

But the psalm begs the questions:

What is God's name for you? Or better yet Who is God to you?

For many of us, we are comfortable with most scriptural analogies...father, shepherd, lord, master, etc. Sometimes we need to be mindful of how inadequate these word pictures are for us...for others. Which makes it difficult to convey authentic meaning behind the original words and the authors' intentions.

And some have turned to more inclusive language in recent years (which does have a legitimate place in our trying to convey ancient ideas), because although profound welcome and radical inclusion is part of God's DNA, some of the language for God that is traditionally used doesn't land on us well inside our current understandings. We don't want to mar the image of God by rigidly sticking to literal terms that have changed in meaning and nuance. Some might say that we are messing with Scripture (which is a concern for sure), but others would also caution that we don't taint the image of God either by not going deeper into our exegetical (or critical interpretation) work.

This is where we experience the blessing of the ancient prayers, songs, psalms because they are constantly asking us to bridge heaven and earth. This is what we do when we sing the psalms. This is what we do when we interpret the psalms.

In our summer sermon series, we are being mindful of the Spirit Tastings...where we experience the exquisite pairing of heaven and earth in these poems...and ask what the Spirit is trying to say to us.

So, let us ask: Is it that our earthly experience with fathers, lords, masters, and shepherds cause us to cringe when we think of God as Lord? Or is it that we want to focus on God's descriptions of himself in these analogies, but we recognize that they are still inadequate in so many ways—the words are not bad in themselves, but they simply “fall short” in encompassing the breadth, width, length, and height of God's prodigal love for all of us.

Again, we need to be mindful of how God wants to reveal himself in the scriptures AND we want to be mindful of how we reveal/represent God to the world...if our experience of a landlord, for instance, hurts God's image in our hearts and minds...then this may be a worthy consideration and we may need to find better language.

God may very well have used these analogies to refer to and reveal his own self as the healthier image for us to focus on. In other words, because God is our father, let us hold all fathers to a higher standard, because God is our shepherd, those who are caretakers must be more attentive, compassionate, protective, and stewards of our hearts, minds, and souls. Language doesn't diminish God, but our understanding behind the meaning of specific words in scripture can blur the message.

SIDEBAR: and then there are pronouns! He, she, they, it—pronouns will always get us into trouble—they are inadequate and messy...isn't it healthier to acknowledge the limits of our English language to describe someone as indescribable as the One who spoke the world into existence, the uncaused cause of the cosmos, the lover of our souls, the alpha and the omega—the one who needs so many names, analogies, stories, and relationships within scripture to just begin try and explain who "he" is—isn't this why we needed his very divine person to become flesh for us, so that we could know him, touch him, embrace him, and walk beside him?

Having said all that, it is compassionate and gracious to be mindful of painting God in the best light as we chose our words carefully when representing the One who was, is and will be...this is part of our devotion to God, our discipleship, our calling, our being image-bearers of Eternal Love (not eternal angst or judgement or ambivalence or scoffing).

One of the most confusing commandments brought down the mountain by Moses was about not taking the Lord's name in vain—this is better understood as to not represent God in a poor light. To take the Lord's name in vain is not to just say God's name or to refer to God incorrectly in language, but it means to represent him poorly to those who so desperately need to hear of his goodness, compassion, wondrous works, steadfast love, and faithful care for us.

In other words (or not words as the case may be), it is not as important to refer to God as Master as it is to show or embody how God is simply God and therefore a sovereign deity who knows us and wants to be known by us. It may not be as important to make sure we get God's pronouns precise as it is to whole-heartedly share with neighbors that God is indeed a noun...a pre-existing, self-existing, and persistent person who longs to call every person, tribe, and nation to God's self.

After all, the gospel reminds us that not everyone who calls God **Lord, Lord** will truly be known by God...it is more important that when we say Lord, we are not

just giving God an old tired title, but that we are inviting God to be the ruler of our hearts, the master of our next steps, the one who guides our minds, souls, and next steps on earth. To call God Lord is not a matter of our intellect, but a matter of our heart and soul.

What is your relationship with the Lord?

What is your relationship with the word LORD?

Psalm 86 is a prayer of David. It is a prayer to the Lord about inviting the Lord to continue to be Lord over David's life. It includes the divine name of God YHWH which is often translated as LORD. It includes simple references to a traditional master, shepherd, and lord as like a head of a household...ADONAY which is translated as Lord. And it includes a reference to God as God, ELOHIM which is translated as simply God.

My Paraphrase of Psalm 86 is my prayer to the Lord about inviting God to be Lord of my Life. If it resonates with you, then I invite you to pray the prayer as I share these words...

The one who was (YHWH), is and will be...give your attention to the deepest cries of my soul and let me hear your response for I need you

Protect my soul as I am hopelessly devoted to you my God (Elohim)

I beg you to show me your mercy as I've called out your name all day O Lord (adonay)

*Pour your joy into my life because you are my one and only
and I give my soul to you (adonay)*

You are the ruler of my life (adonay)

you are good and always willing to forgive

In fact, your true love is sincere

and pours lavishly over anyone who calls on your name

*O forever God (YHWH), give me your attention to the deepest cries of my heart,
listen to this voice that begs to hear yours*

*I will always call out to you and especially in times of trouble because I am
confident that you will respond to me*

*O ruler of my heart (adonay), you are holy and set apart from all other gods—
absolutely nothing and no one compares to your wondrous works*

*O master of my life (adonay), every person, tribe, nation that you allowed to live
will finally come to you, bowing before you to worship and bring honor to your
name.*

*You are great. Your works are wondrous.
You are the self-existing God of all (YHWH)
Look at me. See me. Show me your attention and forever favor.
Invest your strength in me as I am your humble servant
and liberate me as I am your fully adopted heir
Show me any indication that I might know
your favor and goodness is mine to keep
And those who despise me will be embarrassed by your attentiveness to me
For you, the One who was, is and will be (YHWH)
have come to help me and offer me wholeness*

Friends,

No matter our experience, our age, our circumstances, let us reflect on today's psalm as a primer in prayer. Consider the various ways that you address God in your spoken and unspoken prayers. Consider your relationship with the word Lord. Consider your relationship with the Lord...frankly, is it indeed one of lordship (literally or figurately?)... or is it something completely different?

And as you consider how to pray, remember the words of Jesus when he was asked by his beloved disciples how to pray...and he simply said PRAY.

And then he taught us his daily prayer to proclaim God's holiness, to invite the pairing of heaven and earth, to ask for sustenance as needed, and to ask for forgiveness on behalf of self and on behalf of others, to keep us on a sacred path of following his benevolent ways, and then to proclaim the sovereign role of God in not only our lives but in all lives throughout space and time. We say or sing this prayer every Sunday.

It is a prayer given to us by the Lord to the Lord about the very act of making God Lord of our mind, body and spirit, of acknowledging God as LORD and Lord of Lords and the Lord of heaven and earth.

We do not have to religiously cry out **Lord, Lord**, but we do need to invite God to be our Lord (or equivalent wording of your choice) and rule in our hearts as we strive to embody God's love in the world.

So, perhaps today you will call God LORD or Lord for the millionth time or for the first time.

But whatever you may choose, it is important for us to remember what God's name has been for us, is for us, and will always be for us...

BELOVED IS WHERE WE BEGIN

Jan Richardson, from Circle of Grace

*If you would enter
into the wilderness,
do not begin
without a blessing.*

*Do not leave
without hearing
who you are:
Beloved,
named by the One
who has traveled this path
before you.*

*Do not go
without letting it echo
in your ears,
and if you find
it is hard
to let it into your heart,
do not despair.
That is what
this journey is for.*

*I cannot promise
this blessing will free you
from danger,
from fear,
from hunger
or thirst,
from the scorching
of sun
or the fall
of the night.*

*But I can tell you
that on this path
there will be help.*

*I can tell you
that on this way
there will be rest.*

*I can tell you
that you will know
the strange graces
that come to our aid
only on a road
such as this,
that fly to meet us
bearing comfort
and strength,
that come alongside us
for no other cause
than to lean themselves
toward our ear
and with their
curious insistence
whisper our name:*

*Beloved.
Beloved.
Beloved.*

May it be so. May it be so.

