



Making the Name of God Known

Acts 1:6-14; Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35; John 17:1-11

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After forming in Boston more than 50 years ago, Aerosmith recently announced their farewell tour will begin later in 2023. Aerosmith is heralded as the best-selling American rock band of all time. They have more sales certifications — multi platinum, platinum, gold — than any other American group. Over the decades, Aerosmith has released numerous songs that received heavy radio airplay — including Dream On, Walk this Way, and Sweet Emotion. The band frequently makes the short list in rankings of the best bands ever. Aerosmith even has a roller coaster dedicated to them at Disney World. In their statement announcing the tour, the band said, “It’s not goodbye it’s PEACE OUT!”

John 17 – Jesus’ disciples (and us) get to witness his intimate and revealing prayer to his Father soon after his Passover meal where he washed his disciples’ feet and moments before the whole group goes out to the private garden where he gets arrested. In the prayer, Jesus acknowledges how God has given him authority over all the people not to push them around, not to lord it over, but to grant them eternal life (v. 3). In other words, God has given Jesus the power to give us eternal life: the Author of life wants to share eternal life with us, eternal not in terms of a timeline extending for the foreseeable future but in terms of enjoying a relationship with God. To know God’s name (v. 6) is to enter into that relationship, to get to know God as we are known.

To know God’s name means to know what God is about. The deeds of mercy, the healing, the words that Jesus has shared with the people; the work of justice for the establishment of God’s kingdom where all people are honored and included, the reconciliation and the peace into which we are called, all of this speaks to the name of God (v. 8). This was Jesus’ ministry: to make God’s name (reality) known. And this is the Church’s mission.

The question is not: “Does the world notice the Church?” but “Does the world notice God?”

What God is the world committed to? What’s captured the world’s heart? There are many gods in the world’s pantheon (personality cult, ideology, money...) Are those gods life giving? Only the Lord is God and can give life eternal with whatever else we need.

Jesus’ prayer revolves around our protection in that name. It’s in that reality, in that legacy, in that story that we need to be protected. In that name, in those words we need to dwell so that we may not be lost or led astray. It’s that name that will protect us from the evil one in our time of trial as we pray in the Lord’s Prayer.

When people consider the generosity of God in creation, hearts are opened to gratitude and to the mystery of holiness. Awe at the grandeur of creation leads us into humility (see Psalm 8): we

consider how God who has formed the great stars populating the universe as well as the smallest atoms giving structure to the elements cares about us and appreciates us.

The glory of creation and the beauty of God are told every day as Psalm 19 reports:

1 The heavens declare the glory of God;

the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

2 Day after day they pour forth speech;

night after night they reveal knowledge.

3 They have no speech, they use no words;

no sound is heard from them.

4 Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,

their words to the ends of the world.

And it is the closeness of God that inspires lovingkindness: we know how to love because God has first loved us (1 John 4:19). Through Jesus, we experience the joy of being intimately loved and forgiven, and we learn that God wants the world reconciled.

Generosity and love produce wisdom which allows us to know and live in liberating truth.

Read the beginning of the Book of Acts and see how after his crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus appears several times to his disciples and talks about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:1-3).

In the opening lines of the Acts of the Apostles, the second volume of his Gospel, Luke describes the disciples' 50-day period of learning the meaning of the Resurrection. For 40 of those days, the risen Jesus made himself known to them, revealing that he had passed through death and teaching them again what he had always taught: "The reign of God is among you" (Luke 17:21).

Luke is the only evangelist to describe Jesus' ascension, and he ties the two volumes of his Gospel together by describing it at the end of the first and the beginning of the second (Luke 24:50-51; Acts 1:9). In Luke's presentation, just before ascending to the Father, Jesus sent the disciples into a retreat, a 10-day time of reconstituting themselves in preparation for the experience of Pentecost (Acts 1:11-26). He gives them a clear order: stay in Jerusalem until you receive the Holy Spirit as promised by the Father.

The disciples misinterpret once again what Jesus is saying: to them, the sending of the Spirit of God is about restoring the ancient kingdom of Israel; it's about revenge and retrieving the lost honor and glory, the autonomy of which they were deprived following the Roman invasion and occupation; it's about the power to finally self-govern again. To them, Jesus' triumph over death is a confirmation that he is more powerful of any conquering army and a clear indication that the messiah is the political and military king sent by God.

How hard it is to change one's mind and be on board with God's plan.

We tend to be so fixated on our way of seeing things that it takes the intervention of the Spirit to grow in spiritual maturity and accept the reality of the resurrection. We need the Spirit promised by the Father.

But salvation is not an individual journey.

As we hear in Acts, faith is the experience of trusting the presence of God and waiting/yearning for more...together. Together the disciples were sent back to Jerusalem. Together they were to wait for the Holy Spirit as promised by God. Together they would enjoy, experience, experiment with faith and learn what it means to be a community empowered to witness. Genuine faith is a way of life in community.

Jesus assures us that our life together rests in and depends on God's care. Discord within the community will take place, yet the assurance is that God's protection (and the concord found within it) is always available to us by following Jesus' teaching to love one another. Ultimately, this farewell prayer is not a mere goodbye to the community; this prayer leaves us with peace.

Let us celebrate the majesty of God, the presence of Jesus, and the mystery of the Spirit that give us protection and confidence.

Let us pray:

Loving God, you are the everlasting protection of those who listen to Jesus. Guide us in our ongoing mission of continuing his work: bearing witness to you through our embodiment of love, compassion, and dignity for every person. Amen.