

Pentecost 19
September 24 & 25, 2005
Sermon

יהוה How do you say it? I asked the Confirmation class about it last Sunday. Would it help if I told you that it was written in Hebrew? No, because Hebrew speakers don't know how to say it either. They don't say it. It is the name of God. The Israelites refrained from pronouncing God's name because they wanted to avoid the pretension that they were of equal status with God. Pretensions of equality with God are the root and substance of Sin. The classic definition of Sin is narrated to us in the 3rd chapter of Genesis, and Adam & Eve grasping at the empty promise that they can be like gods. This grasping at equality, this pretension, this petty attempt at a violent seizure of power from God takes many forms.

My divine pretensions are most obvious to me in my depression. There was very little in life that could make me happy. I was always tired. I was always sad. I was always nervous. I was always insecure. I was abundantly blessed but would go to bed at night crying out, "When will something go right, God?" and then I would awake in the morning and just want to hide out from the day under the covers. Worst of all I assumed that this was how everybody felt all the time. I was trapped in Sin's jail and didn't even know it. On Epiphany 2004 two coworkers approached me and said, "Tim, you're depressed." I denied it at first, but when I looked up the criteria for depression and realized that I met all but two of them and had for 24 years, I was rudely awakened. You're not perfect, Tim; you need help.

The toughest part of dealing with depression, for me, was realizing that I had it. I could not defeat it. If I was going to be healthy I had to accept that I was sick. I was a child of a fallen humanity in bondage to Sin and unable to free myself. I had to accept that so that I could accept grace: the grace of god to save me and the grace of others to help me. My depression is a constant reminder to me whenever I am tempted to pretend that I do not desperately need God. My name is only Timothy Andrew Leitzke; it is not *the name that is above all names*.

It is all about our frame of mind, and Sin gives us a broken one. Sin tricks us into thinking that we are stuck here by ourselves and can have it all if only we work hard enough. In the letter to the Philippians St. Paul calls upon the church to adopt an alternative frame of mind. To do that means we recognize our mindset is faulty and we empty ourselves of it. When I realized that I was depressed my greatest, toughest challenge was accepting that my frame of mind, the very manner in which I perceived the world, was broken. It scared the living daylights out of me.

We are told that Jesus was the son of a carpenter. We are told that for a while as an adult he followed old crazy John the Baptizer. Who knows what he thought, how he lived, or what he valued? He was human. This human loved people recklessly, he traveled with foreigners, he ate with sinners, and his message of the Reign of God got him killed for rebellion. By the standards of this sinful world his life was a failure. Unemployed seditious thirty-somethings who get the

death penalty are usually thought to have made some bad life choices, but that all depends on your frame of mind.

Friends of Christ, Christ's resurrection shatters our frame of mind. Jesus was beaten, killed and humiliated, but in the resurrection God vindicates Christ. God shocks all of us by raising this failure of a man and revealing him as God's Son, the Crucified and Risen Christ. Jesus did not entertain any notions that his equality to God was something he could seize by force or litigation, but emptied himself, humbled himself, and became obedient to the point of death, and death on a cross at that. *That* is why God raised him. In his reckless love of all people Jesus the Christ shows people how God works. In his emptying of himself and all claims to glory, power and righteousness, Jesus the Christ shows people how God works. In his humbling himself and putting the interests of others ahead of his own, Jesus shows people how God works. In his willingness to become vulnerable for the sake of the weak and lowly Jesus the Christ shows people how God works. Jesus has emptied himself; it is now God at work in Jesus the Christ. He bears the name that is above all names, the unpronounceable יהוה that we humbly translate as "LORD".

Friends of Christ we have a new identity in Christ. It is the new frame of mind into which St. Paul is calling us. For years I thought that I was somebody else. The impact of antidepressants was miraculous. One morning I dropped a bag of cereal in the kitchen. This normally would have required a litany of curses pronounced over the bag, followed by a savage beating of the bag, and a

concluding appeal to God, asking why such stupid things are happening to me. Instead I picked up the bag and put it back in its box and folded the box shut and put it away and thought: that was way too low key a reaction. I was a new person. Our new identity in Christ begins most tangibly in our baptism. In baptism God thrusts us into the waters, drowning the old frame of mind—as antidepressants drown the demons of self-loathing. When we baptize here we use only the so-called Christian Names; we omit the family names. That is because when God raises us out of the waters we are of a new frame of mind and a new family, the Children of God. Jesus emptied himself and took on God’s mindset, and thus has the name above all names, and now we who have been joined to God through Christ have been given the name Child of God.

I am the new Timothy Andrew Child of God. You never had to know the old one. I’m glad you didn’t. He’s still with me, and will always be a part of who I am, but I am more of who I am than I used to be. Thanks to antidepressants I am able to live and function in the world. When something good happens I can recognize it as such. Dear God I actually like people! I’m a raging extravert. I have been transformed, but this transformation is not grounds for me to seize at my own strength or knowledge. I know quite well that without therapy I am a little too loopy for my liking. I know that without the little pill every day an inexplicable and unshakable sadness envelops me. My need for grace has not stopped. We remain children of a fallen humanity. Sin still claws at us, finding new ways to mess up our lives. That change that grace worked for me, though, is

so wonderful that I cannot keep it a secret. I have to tell about it. I know the difference that it made in my life and I just cannot withhold that from others. When I was that depressed I needed a person to tell me, to bear witness to the truth that life did not have to be this way.

We as Children of God, baptized into the new frame of mind of Christ Jesus, have a gift far more wonderful and freeing than this. If we ignore it, we slip back into the way things were. If we do not share it, we leave others trapped not knowing the love that God has in store for them. God forgives. We know this because the one who loved so much that he emptied himself to the point of death, and death on a cross at that, is the one whom God exalted, the one to whom God pointed and said, "That is how I operate. I love. I forgive." This Jesus is the one whom God raised from the dead, and exalted, and to whom God gave the name that is above all names, that in the name of Jesus every knee should bend and every tongue publicly cry out: Lord Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.