



Jesus Christ Above All

By Tracy E. Grindle

The Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison, President of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, proclaimed at the opening service of the 2017 LWML Convention: “Jesus shows us a different way. He lays down a sacrifice, a price. ... He knows each one of you by name and loves you to death — death on a cross.” Deaconess Betty Knapp, Bible Study Leader, encouraged attendees to stay “focused on who we are and what we do. We keep [Jesus] Christ above all as we continue to “Serve the Lord with Gladness.”

OPENING PRAYER: Dear Lord, thank You for Your Word that warns, Your Word that warms, and Your Word that wins our hearts. In the glorious name of Jesus Christ above all. Amen.

Share a time when you did your own thing, took care of yourself, relied on yourself, but still wanted to be called a Child of God. _____

A Name

In that day seven women will take hold of one man and say, “We will eat our own food and provide our own clothes; only let us be called by your name.” (Isaiah 4:1a)

Because of God’s judgment upon Israel, husband material was scarce, and women of Zion were trying anything simply to survive. We can see these women say they will take care of themselves, yet they want to be called by the man’s name. They want the perks, safety and dignity, without the marriage partnership. It seems they want what his name can provide, even if they don’t want him.

I’ve been through times of self-reliance and frenzied determination, going to church and praying as usual, but not giving God the honor He deserves. I wanted to be called by His Name but was not walking with my Beloved — needing the perks, the protection, the dignity of His Name, but not living whole-heartedly for Him. He wants us and the loving relationship.

Compare the attitude and what the women say in **Isaiah 4:1a**, “We will eat our own food and provide our own clothes;” with **Matthew 6:11** and **Proverbs 30:7–8**. From where or from whom does our daily bread really come? _____

Please read **Micah 6:8**, and then name a way we can act on it.

A Canopy

Read **Isaiah 4:2–6**. This beautiful passage is said to be a prophecy regarding the remnant of Israel and their Messiah. It is a wonderful image meant for us too. A canopy will protect from heat, storms, and rain. Between the canopy and the people is a cloud of smoke by day or a glow of flaming fire by night. They can look up and see the glory of the Lord!

How do **Revelation 7:15–16** and **Psalms 91:4** describe the shelter our Beloved offers? _____

Discuss whether living under the canopy sounds liberating or restricting. _____

Satan will certainly tempt us to come out from beneath the canopy, and he may tempt us to live on the edge — stepping out in self-reliance or true defiance, and ducking back in when things go wrong — but that is uncomfortable and even dangerous! We need the individual boundaries God sets for each of us and our personal relationship with our Lord.

Reread **Isaiah 4:3**. What are the people called? _____

What do you think it means to be “recorded among the living”? _____

What light does **Luke 10:20** shed on that phrase? _____

Isaiah 4:4 says: *The Lord will wash away the filth of the women and will cleanse the bloodstains from Jerusalem by a spirit of judgment and a spirit of fire* before He creates the canopy over His people. We are judged, we are refined by fire in order to be cleansed, and we are made holy — not by that refinement, but because the Lord Jesus, who by His death washed away all our sins in Holy Baptism, assures us of His forgiveness.

Choose one or more of these Scriptural references about being refined to read aloud and discuss: **Psalm 66:10; Isaiah 48:10; Daniel 11:35; Daniel 12:10; 1 Peter 1:7.** _____

In what way does desiring to be refined by the Lord show trust? _____

How does living within God's boundaries result in freedom? _____

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In **Philippians 2:9–11**, what actions are expected in response to Jesus' name? _____

Our American culture reveres self-sufficiency, but our Christian faith reveres the Lord and His provision. We still work hard and take care of ourselves and our family, but God centers our hearts in Him. Our speaking "*only let us be called by your name*" is not a cry of arrogance or desperation as it seemed to be for the women of Zion, but the true cry of the bride's heart to her glorious Groom. Being called by His Name is a fantastic honor, a responsibility to act in ways that bring glory to the Name He gives us, and a commitment to being the Bride of Christ.

Look at **Isaiah 4:6** one more time. What a peaceful, fearless place it is under His canopy — a glorious shelter and shade from the heat, a refuge (see **Isaiah 25:4**), and hiding place. Can you picture yourself there — the bride eager to serve and live life with her Groom, eternally safe under His canopy of love?

DISCUSS: How do you feel there? How do you act there? _____

Here are some things to remember. (This could be a marathon Bible search, so you may want to look at the first reference as a group and encourage each other to study the complete set in depth at home. All verses are printed in the leader guide, and there are many other fitting Scriptures not listed. If you decide you are even more of a sprinter, just read the list itself.)

- *We are called by His Name and He calls us by name.* **Isaiah 43:1** and **7; John 20:31; Revelation 3:5**
- *We move deep inside and don't dance on the edge.* **1 Kings 8:23; Matthew 6:24**
- *We recognize the boundaries and stay connected to God.* **Deuteronomy 7:9–11; Matthew 22:36–40; Galatians 5:24–25**
- *We realize holy fruit is expected of us.* **John 15:3–5; Luke 12:48b; Galatians 5:22–23**
- *We are responsible for living holy lives.* **1 Thessalonians 4:7; Leviticus 19:2; Romans 3:23–24**
- *We are guided.* **Psalm 119:105; Proverbs 16:9; Ephesians 5:1–2**
- *Our spirit is guarded, so we can be useful in His Kingdom.* **Romans 8:9a; 2 Timothy 1:13–14; 2 Timothy 2:20–21**
- *We are sheltered by God.* **Psalm 32:7; Psalm 73:28; Mark 4:39–40**
- *What comes from us under the canopy, our hearts joined with His, is the work of the Holy Spirit — what God has done for us in Christ!* **Ephesians 5:8–9; 1 Peter 4:11**
- *All glory is His!* **1 Chronicles 29:11; Romans 11:36; Hebrews 13:20–21**

CLOSING PRAYER: Dear Lord, please show us our errors, refine us, make us fruitful and holy. Create in us a clean heart and record us among Your living people. Thank You for opening the way for us to live under Your glorious canopy. We want to be called by Your Name, Jesus, and reflect Your light into our world for Your glory. We pray in the Holy Name above all names, Jesus Christ. Amen.

CLOSING HYMN: Sing or say together one or more verses of "How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds" (LSB #524; LW #279; TLH #364).

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