

“Singing the Faith: Name of All Majesty”

1 Chronicles 16:8-14 • Philippians 2:1-11

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

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When I was young I had a book and a record of Aesop’s Fables. I always enjoyed listening to the stories and following along in the book. One of the ones I remember well I am sure you are familiar with also. It’s the story of the Tortoise and the Hare. The story goes that a hare, a rabbit, was always making fun of a tortoise because he moved so slowly. So the tortoise finally challenges the rabbit to a race. The rabbit sees this as another opportunity to humiliate the tortoise so he takes him up on the offer. When the race starts the rabbit runs far ahead and thinks he’s got the race won. He decides that to further insult the tortoise that he will take a nap next to the race course while he waits. But he oversleeps and the tortoise, who has been steadily and slowly plodding along, wins the race! The point is that the race is won by steady, faithful progress, rather than fast and flashy effort.

I thought about that fable this week as I read the obituary of retired Church of England bishop Timothy Dudley-Smith, who passed away a couple of weeks ago. Chances are you didn’t even know he had died or even that he had lived. And yet he has had a tremendous impact on the Christian church worldwide. The thing that Dudley-Smith is best known for are the hymns he wrote. Unlike John Newton, whose hymn *Amazing Grace* came out of his dramatic life-change, and unlike Horatio Spafford, whose hymn *It Is Well with My Soul* was written out of dramatic tragedy and loss, Dudley-Smith’s hymns were written out of a life of steadfast, faithful service to Christ and His church. This seems to be the kind of faith life we want people to have, and yet we never celebrate it. We tend to focus on the dramatic. Not today.

Timothy Dudley-Smith passed away on August 12th at the age of 97. When he was 11 his father passed away. He said that when that happened, rather than losing faith he realized his need for a heavenly father. It was also around that time that he began to feel called to ministry.

He attended Cambridge University where he studied theology, then went on to seminary there and was ordained a priest in the Church of England in 1951. He retired as a bishop 40 years later. In 1954, just a few years after entering the ministry, he helped with the Billy Graham crusade in England and later served as editor of a Christian magazine published by the Evangelical Alliance. But the thing he is best known for are the hymns he wrote – over 400 of them!

In a time when we routinely hear of the moral failings of celebrity pastors, it’s worth pausing to ask how someone like Timothy Dudley-Smith was able to accomplish what he did over so many years. The answer, I think, is his firm belief in and dependence on Jesus as Lord, which is the subject of his hymn *Name of All Majesty*. The phrase “Jesus is Lord” was used in the early church as the first baptismal creed. We may not think about it all that much when we hear or say those words. But in the first century, saying them was dangerous and costly, much like it is today in places like Iran.

During the New Testament times, the Roman Emperors were considered gods. Julius Caesar had the inscription “Caesar is Lord” put on coins and by the time of Emperor Domitian, people were expected to say it while bowing before his statue. The Christians, however, refused. Instead, they said, “Jesus is Lord,” which is what led to the persecution of Christians. Ironically, Christians in the Roman Empire were considered pagans.

This is the context of Paul’s letter to the Philippians. The church in Philippi was the first church on the continent of Europe and pastored by a business woman named Lydia. In verse 10 and 11 of Philippians 2, Paul says, “at the name of *Jesus*, not *Caesar*, every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Many scholars believe that this was perhaps an early hymn that they sang to remind them of the faith. Leading up to this great declaration, however, Paul makes the case as to *why* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and why we are to be like Him. Timothy Dudley-Smith's hymn *Name of All Majesty* tells this same story. The hymn is a summary of the gospel!

The first verse expresses that Jesus is God and has been from all eternity. "Name of all majesty, fathomless mystery, King of the ages by angels adored; power and authority, splendor and dignity, bow to his mastery, Jesus is Lord!" Philippians 2:6 says that before his incarnation, Jesus was "in the form of God." Colossians 1 puts it this way: "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together." Jesus, in John 17:5, prayed, "And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed."

Paul continues in verses 6 and 7: "though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant (literally a slave), being born in the likeness of men." The second stanza of the hymn goes, "Child of our destiny, God from eternity, love of the Father on sinners outpoured; see now what God has done sending his only Son, Christ the beloved One, Jesus is Lord!" God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. In order to reconcile us to Him, the creator God came here in person as one of his creatures, as one of us.

The third stanza of the hymn is, "Savior of Calvary, costliest victory, darkness defeated and Eden restored; Born as a man to die, nailed to a cross on high, Cold in the grave to lie—Jesus is Lord! As Philippians 2:8 puts it, "being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming

obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." Jesus paid the ultimate penalty for our sin so that we could experience forgiveness and have our relationship with God restored. As Colossians 2 puts it, "And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross."

The final stanza is about the resurrection of Jesus and our participation in it. "Source of all sovereignty, light, immortality, life everlasting and heaven assured; So with the ransomed, we praise Him eternally, Christ in His majesty—Jesus is Lord!" Romans 6:5 assures us, "if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall *certainly* be united with him in a resurrection like his."

As Timothy Dudley-Smith reminds us in this hymn, what's left for us to do is to praise Christ Jesus eternally. In other words, we are to live like Jesus is not just a lord but *the* Lord, *your* Lord! This is hard for us. We tend to want to be our own lord, to feel like we are in control of our own lives. When you live like that you end up on your best days trying to squeeze Jesus into your busy life. But He has a better way and we find it here in Philippians 2. Paul basically says, "If you find any value in submitting your life to Christ, here's what your life should look like: Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves."

I think it's safe to say that all of us struggle with humility. And if you think you don't, that's a pretty good sign that you aren't humble. You can't really say, "I'm the best at being humble." That's like the old boxing promoter Don King who said, "I never cease to amaze my own self. And I say that humbly." That's not really humility, is it. God says, "count everyone else as more important than yourself." Everyone? Yes. Everyone. "Let each of you look not only to his

own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

What would your marriage look like if you set aside your own desires to meet the needs and wants of your spouse? What would our church look like if every one of us was more concerned about helping the children to know Jesus than about what we will eat for lunch? What would our community look like if each of us sacrificed our time and money to help other people flourish? There’s an old story about a student who asked his rabbi why, in the Scriptures there were many people who saw God but today no

one can see Him. The rabbi answered, “Nowadays, no one stoops that low.”

God *is* the best at being humble. He emptied himself and became a slave, humbling himself to the point of death so that you can flourish. That’s why Jesus has the “name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.” We praise Him with our mouth but also with our actions, humbly, slow and steady rather than fast and flashy, faithful and steadfast for a lifetime.

Amen.