

John 14:1-14  
May 14, 2017

*On the night that he is to be arrested, Jesus shares final words with his disciples. As the one through whom God is known, he promises to go before them and act on their behalf.*

The holy gospel according to John, the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter.

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

[Jesus said to the disciples:] <sup>1</sup>“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. <sup>2</sup>In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup>And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. <sup>4</sup>And you know the way to the place where I am going.” <sup>5</sup>Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” <sup>6</sup>Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. <sup>7</sup>If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

<sup>8</sup>Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” <sup>9</sup>Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? <sup>10</sup>Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. <sup>11</sup>Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. <sup>12</sup>Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. <sup>13</sup>I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. <sup>14</sup>If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.”

The gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

“I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.” I don’t know about you but I find it nearly impossible to read this passage, hear those last words Jesus speaks, and be totally fixated on them almost to the point that whatever was said in the first 12 verses has all but vacated my mind as if I didn’t even hear them. All I can hear is “if in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.” I think this passage stumps a lot of people. Faithful Christians who in their time of need cry out and nothing seems to happen. On face value Jesus doesn’t appear to act. Doubt sets in. Questions arise. Maybe even a bit of angst at Jesus wondering if his sayings were just a pack of lies.

Prayer is many things and this passage truly makes us ponder the efficacy of prayer. Does it work? Jesus says he will do anything so why have I not won the lottery yet? Why has our church not grown as much as the mega churches that we think we need to compete with or get jealous of? Why can’t I yet play golf following my neck surgery? These questions in and of themselves are not bad questions to take to God in prayer; because, after all prayer is communication with God. Just as is the case of any relationship to truly flourish, grow, and give life there has to be communication. Honesty. Openness. Thus, asking God to win

the lottery is being honest with God about what lies on our heart. What we think we need to right everything that is wrong in our lives. Yet, when it doesn't happen many folks become discouraged and think they didn't have enough faith. They didn't pray correctly. God didn't hear their prayer. Perhaps even somewhere along the line someone told them this.

Prayer is something in my own spiritual journey that has truly transformed through the years and it continues to each and every day. Many years ago I was deeply wounded by someone. I wanted revenge. I wanted them to experience the pain I was experiencing. Sometime later I was told prayer such as that was unacceptable. To some extent I might agree. I even stand up here somewhat hesitant to share such a story because I am not proud of it. However, as my journey of faith has traversed through its ups and downs I have often pondered being told that prayer was unacceptable. That it was a bad prayer. It was, after all, being honest with God. It was turning to God and admitting what lied within my heart at that moment. But was it prayer "in the name" of Jesus? The answer to that question, I believe, is "NO," which we will unpack shortly. Yet, it was prayer and in many ways I think that prayer was answered as I reflect back upon it. I was angry. I was hard of heart. I was selfish and out for revenge. This prayer was answered in that all those emotions were taken to God as opposed to being

directed at my neighbor I was so mad at. In that moment, the best thing I could do was take all that animosity to God. In so doing, God went to work on my heart releasing those emotions and slowly opening my eyes to the fact I was the one in need of healing. I was the one in need of forgiveness and God was there to offer it. That prayer I believe was answered because it saved me from seeking revenge upon that person that hurt me. It transformed me to finally see past that and move to have a discussion with that person. To tell them they had hurt me. To begin the process reconciliation. While at the time my consciously my prayer was not done in love of my neighbor in some ways, looking back, that prayer perhaps subconsciously was the best thing I could have done to love my neighbor who had hurt me in that moment.

Which brings us around to the 3 most important words in those last 2 verses of our text today – IN MY NAME. “I will do whatever you ask *in my name*, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If *in my name* you ask me for anything, I will do it.” Countless times do we offer up our prayers and end them in some sort of manner that in essence says, “all this we ask in Jesus’ name. Amen.” But do we ponder what it means to pray in his name. We want Jesus to act. We want him to make it all better. We want our prayers to work. I want to win the lottery. We want to have more people in the pews. I want to play golf

now. Notice something. So many times it is all about us isn't it. Prayer turns into nothing more than fulfilling our perceived wants. Now, as I said before, I still believe it is OK to take these feelings to God; however, when nothing happens we should not give up on God. Perhaps, the silence is indeed our answer and we certainly can't become despaired that God didn't hear our prayer because that is a promise lifted up time and time and time again in the Bible. To pray "in Jesus' name" is to trust in the promise that prayer is heard. Henry French writes in his book, *Prayer a primer* (Augsburg Books, 2009, p. 16) that when his boys were young they would often pray to have pizza for supper every day. Of course, they didn't get it but that didn't mean their prayer was not heard as their young minds had perceived. Their father indeed had heard their request but the answer was no.

Praying "in the name" of Jesus is also much more. Jesus reiterates some form of this phrase, "If we pray in the name of Jesus, he will give it to us" six times in John's gospel. Thus, clearly it is important. John is about many things but one of the central tenets is that knowing Jesus is abiding in Jesus. Knowing Jesus is about living in his love. One way of abiding in Jesus, of growing in our relationship with him, is indeed communicating with him – prayer. But it is also about being transformed by that love and then living out that grace, mercy, and compassion

he has shown us through loving our neighbor. And love is at the very heart of what it means to pray “in his name.” It is prayer rooted in love of the other. It is prayer that sees past our wants and see those of our neighbor. Perhaps instead of praying for people to fill our pews, a prayer in the name of Jesus might be that through us the light of Christ might shine and open those whom we encounter up to his love. That their lives might be transformed and subsequently so will ours. That we might encounter Christ through them. Love is at the root of everything it means to know Jesus. To follow Jesus. To worship Jesus. To pray to Jesus.

French also tells the story of a young man on a spiritual retreat. He engrossed himself in reading every book he could find on spirituality and theology yet still felt something amiss. He then decided he needed a spiritual guide and found such a teacher living nearby. He was a man of deep spiritual wisdom, respected by all. As the young man knocked on the door and it was opened, the teacher asked what he could do for the young man to which the young man responded that he was on a spiritual quest and wanted to know everything there was to truly live a spiritual life. He showed the teacher his trunk full of the books he had read. The teacher immediately slammed the trunk closed and said, “The way of God is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the rest is mere

commentary. Now, go. Go out among your neighbors and learn what love means.” (p. 19-20)

To pray in Jesus’ name is to pray out of love for our neighbor. But it is also to be sent. To act. We can’t simply pray for peace or the hungry to be fed or naked to be clothed. Praying in the name of Jesus moves us to be active participants with God in bringing an answer to those prayers. Going out to feed the hungry, visit the sick, speak out when we see others being taken advantage of, without voice, or being treated unfairly, unequally, and unjustly due to their race, or their class in society, or their gender, or their nationality, or their religion, or anything else for that matter. Living lives of love that reflect the same compassion, mercy, and forgiveness Jesus has given to us.

Love thy neighbor. It lies at the heart of our very being because when Jesus prayed in the John’s gospel it was it was for his disciples, it was for those who would come to believe in his name, and how Jesus lived his life in John’s gospel was for the sake of the world. He didn’t just live his life but he gave it. For you. For me. For our neighbor. Because he loved us. He loved the world. Amen.