

**Sermon – 5<sup>th</sup> Easter**  
**John 14:1-14**  
**May 10, 2020**

**“You Mean Anything at All God”?**

*”I will do whatever you ask in my name...  
if in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it”.*

Well that should about settle it – in prayer to God ask whatever you wish...mention who sent you...and presto! If only... Or, if only we weren't such a suspicious people when it comes to promises. But we've been conditioned to take claims with sizable grains of salt – we don't buy unless we read the reviews. Mired as we are in the frustratingly fluid situation of ‘sheltering in place’, we have not much else to do but listen to experts telling us the pandemic is likely heading in this direction – till that is another expert tells us it's not – usually within the same day if not the same hour.

So, these words of Jesus in John 14:13-14 strike us as dubious or exaggerated. Prayer doesn't work like that, and if it did more people would actually pray. Moreover, many of us have tried numerous times ourselves and found prayers in Jesus name do not bring us the result we had in mind. Why would Jesus make such a statement? It's of no small significance that this section of John's gospel is referred to as our Lord's “farewell discourse” - he was in his last hours of life soon to pray that His Father would take his suffering away – which of course His Father did not.

Some would say Jesus was making one final, ambitious attempt to get his followers to believe in him. He'd spoke of giving them sleeping quarters in a mansion (which may have sounded a lot like “palace” to his men, as in a king's palace) and if that weren't enough to curry favor he now promises “anything you want in my name” – the sort of pledge an earthly king with unquestioned power and limitless wealth could grant to a favored servant by the way - but that view doesn't hold much water. If Jesus followers became believers simply because of what they could “get” in Jesus name, why did their following not really materialize and intensify until after it was evident what it would “cost them” to call Jesus Christ Lord?

But as in all promises – for illustration purposes only I’ll use the word “claim” – you have to read “the fine print.” Clearly Jesus’ aim is to entice us to pray....and to be persistent in prayer. Have we misunderstood our Savior? Is there some contextual key we’ve missed in comprehending these words? Does he really mean anything? The answer to all three questions is...yes. Dr. Olaf Hallesby, a Norwegian teacher and author of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, defined prayer like this; “*prayer is a condition of the mind, an attitude of the heart...expressed in quiet thinking, audible words, even a deep sigh. It is a free, spontaneous fellowship between the created person and the personal creator*”.

We should pray without anxiousness and without regard to form Dr. Hallesby contends, and Martin Luther concurs when in his explanation to the Lord’s Prayer he says of the salutation “our Father in heaven” “*here God encourages us to believe that he is truly OUR Father and we his children. We therefore are to pray to him in complete confidence, as children would a loving father.*”

Ok, we don’t need to come to God quaking and shaking (though we should always come in reverence) but the vital question is...what about content? What should we pray about...anything? In a sense, yes. If we pray for something that’s selfish, will not benefit us or would harm someone else, God will reveal that to us in ample time...God is a patient listener...we may be cramped for time, God isn’t. So in a sense, Jesus is saying in our lesson “pray for anything and everything” – ‘*get it out there, spill it like so much seed and see what takes root, and I will sort out what you need.*’ Pray like talking with your closest friend. You don’t edit those conversations, nor should you edit your visits with God. Jesus said ask anything...so do it.

Yet , and here is where I suggest we sometimes miss what I earlier referred to as “the fine print” - keep in mind the issue of *that name* when you pray. Contextually the key to this lesson is the intervening words between Jesus’ command/promise regarding prayer. We are to pray, “*so that the Father may be glorified in the Son*”. Earlier in the gospel of John, in the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter, Jesus, having entered Jerusalem to ‘praise and palms’ only days before his trial and death, confounds his followers by saying he had arrived at “his hour”.

John 12:27-28 records Jesus saying “*now my heart is very troubled, but what shall I say; “Father, save me from this hour? No, it was for this very reason that I came to this hour”*”, concluding; “*Father, glorify your name”*. That’s a prayer by the way. The Father’s answer is immediate; “*I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again”*. Prayer, even our most urgent, heartfelt and personal ones, should ask that the Father’s will be done, that God’s kingdom be awakened in us and increased around us...”*that his name be glorified”*. That prayer will be answered every time.

The late Eugene Peterson, in his delightful paraphrase of the New Testament “The Message” expressed John 14:13-14 this way “*I, on my way to the Father, am giving you the same work to do that I’ve been doing...From now on, whatever you request along the lines of who I am and what I am doing, I’ll do it. That’s how the Father will be seen for who he is in the Son. I mean it. What you request this way, I’ll do.”* Every loving parent wants to give good gifts to their child. Yet every wise parent knows that not every request is good for the child or for the larger family. Jesus himself said, in Luke 11:11; “*what parent among you, if a child asks for a fish will give him a serpent instead”?*”

The aim of prayer should be to let God *into*, even determine, our needs, not just let him hear them. When Jesus said that if in his name we can expect to receive whatever we ask, he was inviting us to ask for what glorifies God’s name. Leading you through the valleys of your life, into the light of his mercy, forgiveness, freedom from guilt, entreating him to give direction to your life, glorifies God’s name, and should be prayed for.

But to follow Jesus is the chief aim of prayer. “*Father glorify your name”*...from our lips, repeats the very ones of Jesus...we follow when we pray like that. And as our lesson says, even greater works than Jesus did will be done when Christians pray like that. Even greater works. In his lifetime, Jesus walked the roads of Galilee, healed their sick, taught their young and old, freed folks from their sins, and guided them in their life. But he never covered more than 100 miles from one end of his ministry to the other. Through us, when we pray, mission is done around the world. Through us when we pray, hundreds, not just a dozen or so are trained for leadership in the church as pastors, evangelists, teachers, and musicians.

Through us when we pray, untold numbers receive health care, access to clean water and better nutrition. Through us when we pray, the church is planted where the name of Christ has scarcely been heard much less glorified - his story is told, believed, and even though dangerous, his name praised. Prayer is the oxygen of the Christian and the Christian church. Remove it, and the flame to glorify the name goes out. Keep the supply going, and there is nothing in Jesus name that can not be done.

Like tiny droplets of water, our prayers find their way to the staging ground of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, gather force there, changes things, not the least of which is us. Yes, Jesus means it when he says “ask for anything”...and the fact that you ask means you’ve started to receive what you need most...time with God. As Hallesby noted’ *God is not made of stone...Christ has shown us he has a human heart...and that heart is moved to happiness every time a prayer passes our lips.*

Whispered, shouted, sighed, it matters not how...only that we pray. When you pray asking that God’s name be glorified in you, with praise and thanks clearing the way for what you say, you sound remarkably like Jesus did. His name on your lips, you can imagine more vividly the one whose suffering love for your sake gave you access to the throne room of heaven – not just a room down the hall. A mind fixed on Jesus is the utmost request we can make, and the best answer we could ever receive.

When I was in seminary, I was taught this prayer, penned by Charles Francis Whiston. Please pray it along with me....*“Lord Christ, in obedience to your claim on me, I surrender myself to you anew today, all that I am, all that I have, to be wholly and unconditionally yours for your using of me. Take me away from myself and my preoccupation with myself. Use me up as you will, when you will, where you will, with whom you will.”* AMEN