

Year A
5th Sunday of Easter
John 14:1-14

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Today's Gospel lesson is one that we all have heard before, especially at funerals. It can be very comforting to hear that there is something for us all to look forward to at the end of this life, and that we don't need to let our hearts be troubled about what comes after death. But there is even more than that here in Jesus's farewell discourse. He's not only talking about the afterlife, but about how the disciples, and how *we*, can live now.

Jesus is trying to help his disciples see what they should be doing with their lives, now that they realize he's not going to be the military Messiah that their scriptures had led them to expect. Jesus is more than that; he is the son of God. This is so difficult for the disciples to get their heads around, even when Jesus says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him." Because they have seen and know Jesus, they also have seen and know God. That is staggering.

And Phillip absolutely can't take it in. "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied," he says. It's as if he hadn't heard what Jesus just said. So Jesus explains again that he is in God, and God is in him, and Jesus does the works—the signs, the miracles—that he does because God lives in him and works through him. Then Jesus tells them another staggering fact: when he leaves to go back to his Father, those who believe in Jesus will be able to do the works that Jesus does—in fact greater things. Also, "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."

Again, this statement is astounding. I can imagine that many of you have prayed for something in Jesus's name—and been disappointed in the outcome. You might be thinking, "that statement is just not true." Let's think about what Jesus is **not** saying here. He's not saying that if we use the formula of tacking "in Jesus' name" onto the end of the prayer, he's going to grant that prayer. He's not talking about magic, or wish granting. What he **is** saying is that if we are praying in Jesus' name, we are aligning our spiritual desires with his. We are saying, "Jesus, give us what you long for us to have. Help us to trust in you, and want what you want."

A few years ago I was sitting with two women whose father, in his late eighties, was on full life support in the ICU. The day before they had been told that there was nothing more that could be done to make their father better, and they were given two options. The first one was of keeping their father on the current life support situation, but making it surgically permanent by attaching the breathing machine to a tracheostomy in his throat, and then surgically implanting a feeding tube in his stomach. To live like this he would need to go to a special long-term care hospital, which was almost three hours away—and remember, even with all this, he would not get better.

This life support would just be the way he lived from now on. The second option was of removing the life support treatment, and keeping him comfortable, allowing him to die naturally

As you can imagine, hearing this was incredibly hard for these women. Even hearing me describe this to you was probably not easy, so you can imagine how devastated they were, and how they were struggling to make the best decision possible. As we talked together, they said they were sure their father would *not* want to be on life support indefinitely, if there were no hope of his getting better.

I pointed out that if they knew what their father's wishes were, it was important for them to honor them. He had trusted his daughters to do what he would want. They agreed, but one daughter said "it's hard to even think of *allowing* Dad to die." I agreed but said "thinking of it that way makes it even harder, though, doesn't it? Because you can't keep your dad *from* dying by making one decision or another. What you *can* do is choose the *way he lives* the rest of his life. If you believe he wouldn't want to be on life support anymore, then put it in God's hands."

"Put it in God's hands?" one daughter asked. "What do you mean?"

"Pray about it," I said. "Ask God what you should do." They thanked me, and said they would pray about it, and talk about things with their cousins, and make a decision. "But," the one daughter told me "I just don't know if I *can* do what I think he wants."

The next morning I saw that their father was still on my follow-up list, but he'd been moved out of critical care, into a regular room. I went immediately to see him, and as I approached his room, one of his daughters caught sight of me. She ran to the door, smiling, and said "Chaplain Melanie, you said to put it in God's hands, and LOOK what God did!" Instead of being on a breathing machine, her father was sitting up in bed, *talking* with his other daughter. Together they told me that they were going to be able to take their Dad home that afternoon with hospice, where they could all be comfortable together. They were grateful for the extra time, and Dad said that they had made the right decision.

When these women were able to ask God for guidance, to align their desires with Jesus's will for their father's life, something happened that was a totally unexpected gift. They actually were given more time to spend with their father. Jesus says things like this will be done "so that the Father may be glorified in the Son." If you align your desires with Jesus', what do you imagine Jesus would desire *for you*? Have you asked him? I don't mean what do you think Jesus wants you to *do*. I mean what does Jesus *desire for* you? If we are living in the Spirit, and if we have the courage to be in God, and allow God to be in us, what could life be like? Amen.

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