

Acts 7:55-60; Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16; 1 Peter 2:2-10; John 14:1-14

“Ask in my name”

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

“Do not let your hearts be troubled.” Jesus’ opening words in today’s gospel seem tailor-made for us because there is no shortage of things to worry about. Globally and domestically our lives are filled with worry and anxiety.

Jesus said these words because his disciples were troubled that Jesus was leaving them. Jesus had made no secret about his mission as God’s Son, to suffer death and be raised, and yet his disciples still did not understand this work of suffering-love for all the world.

“Believe in God; believe also in me.” These words were meant to encourage the disciples because they did not yet understand what it means to follow Jesus, to believe in him, and to ask in his name. Jesus is teaching the disciples – and us – to believe in him and to ask in his name. As his modern day disciples, we are to follow him, believe in him, and ask in his name.

Yet many today may look around and wonder, “Where is God?” Daily we see the world anguished by hatred, displaced by war, and angered by cruelty. We are, of course, scientifically and technologically advanced, but we are still just as ruthless as were our forebears in antiquity. Just as Jesus was teaching the early church to trust in him, he is also speaking to us today. Yet as modern people, we face two great temptations: unfaith and cynicism. What I mean by “unfaith” is that some simply give up believing, saying, “I’ve tried to believe but God really never shows up in the world, and if anything, religion does more harm than good in the world.” Others may say, “I’ve spent my life trying to do good, but it doesn’t seem to make any difference at all.” Amid such thoughts, Jesus continues to come to us saying, “Believe in God; believe also in me.”

The truth is that believing and asking in his name is what truly changes us. Believing moves us from unfaith and cynicism to asking in the power of his name so that he might yet again, work through each of us. Jesus does show up in the world – he shows up in you and in me. Believing gives us courage and strength to be his hands and voices in the world.

Jesus promises that believing has power, saying “*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...*” For two millennia, Jesus has been showing up in the world in Christians who do works of love, mercy, peace, and justice. Jesus’ work is never finished, however, because for two millennia human beings have also been messing things up with empire, nationalism, colonialism and the many other “isms” we have followed instead of following him. Instead of pointing to the nearness of

God's kingdom and proclaiming the reality of a loving Father and his house, with enough room for all people, Christians have time and time again sought to exclude others – as if we could deny anyone access to the Father's house!

What does Jesus mean by "*greater works than these?*" This congregation's Soup Kitchen will on May 7th, for example, celebrate 12 years of feeding the hungry - a miracle of 30,000 meals. Multiply that by all the soup kitchens, shelters, pantries, hospitals, hospices, schools around the world that have believed and asked in his name for over two thousand years, and you begin to get the idea of Jesus' words, "*and, in fact, you will do greater works than these.*" The key is not to stop believing and asking in his name.

In my experience, today's gospel is probably the most requested text for funerals. Jesus promises a place called "*my Father's house*" – a house of dwelling places – a house with room enough for all the world and its beleaguered people. Jesus says that he goes to prepare a place and will return to take us there so that where he is, there we may be also. Jesus' idea of heaven is a house filled with the human family, where we can all be with him forever.

The most telling question to ask someone is about their idea of heaven. I am always astounded by how exclusionist many people are about heaven – about who is not going to be in heaven – as if we get to make that decision! In saying "*there are many dwelling places,*" Jesus is telling us there is enough room for all. It is helpful to remember who is telling us this: Jesus the Messiah who was born in a stable because there was no room for him in the inn, and who was pushed out of the world onto a cross because he dared to proclaim the nearness of God's kingdom of love. Jesus promises the Father's house – a place that is as large and wide as the love of God, with room enough for all people. I think this is why people want this read at their funerals, because when we die, we will leave everything behind in our houses and will have to rely solely on Jesus. He alone is the way to the Father's house.

Without Jesus, we would not know "the way" to the Father, and without Christians who daily live the way of Jesus, we would never know him or his Way. On the Sunday that Jesus calls himself "the way," we remember that the oldest name for Christianity was also "the Way." In the Book of Acts, Christianity was known as the Way because Jesus' followers lived the Way of love, the Way of forgiveness, the Way of the cross, and in doing so, made Jesus known. Jesus says, "*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*" The Way is a way of believing and asking in his name – it is a way at odds with "the way of the world."

Believe in him. Ask in his name. He will help you to walk in the Way. It's hard to imagine someone calling themselves Christian who does not walk in the Way, speak his truth, and share his life with others.

Finally, Jesus says, *“I will do whatever you ask in my name. If you ask in my name, I will do it.”* Take care around his name. Take care when you ask his name. Remember you are praying in his name and not in yours. I certainly don’t pray in my name. Who am I? I rely upon his name. He knows me by name, who I am, and what I need.

I’d like to share a story with you. Like many people, I had different jobs in high school, college and seminary. I worked as a building maintenance engineer, learning basic electrical and plumbing skills; I worked in graphics design; and I was, of all things, a doorman at a few properties on Chicago’s Gold Coast. One day while working as a doorman, I opened the door for a woman returning home with a little girl. The child was five or six years old, and looking up at me innocently asked, “What’s your name?” The woman, who could have been a mother or grandmother said: “Oh, honey, he’s just the doorman, he doesn’t have a name.”

As I said, “Who am I?” My name doesn’t have much power. Yet though I may be unknown to many, I believe and ask in Jesus’ name because he knows who I am. I trust that he hears my prayers and will welcome me into the Father’s house where he is both Son and heir. Have you ever been treated as if you didn’t exist, as if people looked straight through you? Jesus knows all the nameless and forgotten people in this world. Jesus know who you are and will welcome you into the Father’s house.

The test of any prayer is, of course, “Can I ask this in the name of Jesus?” No one, for instance can pray for revenge, personal profit, or murder in the name of Jesus. Take care around his name. Take care when you ask his name. Remember you are praying in his name and not in yours.

Four simple sounding but powerful words that will change you: *“Ask in my name.”* Prayers spoken in his name become prayers for others, for our enemies, the poor, the outcast, and all whom Jesus calls us to serve and to pray for.

*“Ask in my name”* is the work Jesus gives to each of us, as we follow him on the Way to the Father’s house. Prayer is our daily vocation.

*Do not let your hearts be troubled.* Believe in him, ask in his name, and you will always know the way to the Father. Amen.