

“I Will Do Whatever You Ask”  
A Sermon Preached by Frank Mansell III  
John Knox Presbyterian Church – Indianapolis, Indiana  
May 14, 2017

**John 14: 1-14**

What’s your favorite room in your house? If you’re a child, it might be your bedroom or a playroom, where all your toys and games are located, and you can lose yourself in a world of fantasy and creativity. If you’re a teenager, it might be your bedroom or an entertainment space in the basement, where you can escape from family and outside pressures, and relax with movies, video games, or music. If you’re an adult, perhaps it’s the living or dining rooms, where you host friends and family and share memories of lively conversations and laughter. Or maybe it’s the kitchen, where you love to cook and create dishes that fill others’ bellies with delicious food. If you’re a man, it very well is wherever the largest television is with a recliner, so you can fall asleep while “watching” your favorite team!

The rooms of our house hold very special meaning to us. They are where we rest, where we grow, where we live. Our childhood memories are most often associated with the space in which we lived and grew up. It is in these rooms that we laugh around the dinner table, that we cry over news of a loved one’s death, and that we hold each other in tender moments of silence. It is in these spaces that we seek refuge from the world of work, school, and life.

I have always appreciated greatly the image of heaven being a house with many rooms, an image that Jesus shares with his disciples in our passage today. It recalls how as God’s children, we have been created to be in relationship with one another, and it is in spaces like our homes that those relationships are forged and deepened. In the same way, Jesus assures us that, “In (his) Father’s house there are many dwelling places” (14:2). It is there that he will prepare a place for us, taking us to himself, so that wherever he is, there we will be also (14:3). Just like our earthly homes are spaces of rest, renewal, and peace, so will our eternal home be through our risen Lord.

This passage from John is on the night of Jesus’ betrayal, before he would die on Good Friday. It is one part of his long goodbye to his disciples, who understandably were anxious and afraid of what was to come. So why do we read this today, in the season after Easter? Perhaps because we also can hear him saying this after his resurrection, as he prepares to depart them for his heavenly Father.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. I will come again and take you to myself. If you know me, you will know my Father also. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it” (14:1-14, selected verses).

As Jesus reassures his disciples of their ultimate home that awaits them, he also reveals the close, intimate nature of God that dwells in him. When Thomas asks him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the

way?" Jesus responds with three simple words to describe himself: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." Jesus tells his disciples what he is, and how the essence of his identity changes everyone who comes in contact with him.

Jesus is the way to know the Father, the way to experience God incarnate, right here in front of you. As he tells his disciples: "If you know me, you will know my Father also." We do not need another way to God - we only need the one Way.

Jesus is the truth that we can rely on when all else seems to crumble away. If we know and trust the way to God in Jesus Christ, then we will experience the truth of God's will and transforming love.

Jesus is the life that changes life itself. He offers life that redeems us from the depths of sin and death. He gives life and supports life when it appears life could never come forth.

Jesus is the one way, the transforming truth, and the giver of life itself.

But to be honest, there was one statement which I kept stumbling on as I read this passage. Jesus says, "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" (14:13-14).

Doesn't that sound like a guarantee to answer our prayers? And yet how many times have we asked God for something and it has not occurred? I have a laundry list that I can think of. Healing and wholeness of those who are ill with disease; sparking a fire of faith in those who have become complacent; an end to the partisan bickering which now defines our government on all levels; ten tithing millionaires to become a part of our congregation (sorry, that one slipped in there). And yet, and yet, and yet . . . I mean, really, Jesus, you said you'd do it if we asked you. Where's the answered prayer? What gives?

Fred Anderson, former pastor at Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York, addresses this discrepancy in a sermon he preached.

In our new members' preparation classes at Madison Avenue, when we discuss the two natures of Jesus - fully human and fully divine - I like to ask, "How did Jesus do the miraculous things he did, out of his divine nature or his human nature?" Inevitably people respond with a hesitant question, "Out of his divine nature?" As tempting as that is to believe, it flies in the face of one of the earliest confessions of the church. Paul quotes the confession in his letter to the Philippians, as an illustration of Jesus' humility, urging the same on the Philippians. He reminds them that though Christ "was in the form of God, [he] did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant." He became human, just like the rest of us. The pre-existent, eternally begotten Son of the Father, divested himself of all his divine power to take on human flesh at the incarnation. How then did he do those miraculous things? He did them through the power of the Father.

As Jesus prepares to return to the Father, he tells us that you and I have access to the same power, when asked in his name. He promises to do whatever we ask in his name. Now hear me clearly. This is not a promise for chocolate cake

at the drop of a hat, straight A's without some very hard work, instant parking places, or a stock-market portfolio that is always ahead of the Dow Jones Index. It is a promise Jesus gives to his body, the church, for the church. This is the meaning of asking in his name. To the extent that what we ask of the risen Lord is in accord with his will and purpose for the church in the world. That he will do in and through us.

Think about it. Indeed, we have seen even greater works than he did, whether that has been the world-wide spread of the gospel with his word of love, forgiveness and reconciliation in the search for peace, his work to heal and make whole as the church has established hospitals and schools all across the globe, or his value for human life, even the least of these a norm woven into the ethics of much of western culture. Whatever we ask in his name he promises to do. There is no power shortage here for any of us, so long as it is Christ's work we are taking up ("No Power Shortage Here," Fred Anderson, April 20, 2008, [www.day1.org/1090-no\\_power\\_shortage\\_here](http://www.day1.org/1090-no_power_shortage_here)).

Too often, I think, we ask Jesus to take care of our problems or concerns the way we think they need to be taken care of. We believe the best solution to strife in the church is for our side to win; "Jesus, may you let my opponents see the light." We believe that the answer to our financial challenges is one benefactor who will save us; "Jesus, bring us the help we so desperately need." How many times do we see what is in our best interest through our eyes, and not through God's eyes?

When Jesus says, "If you ask for it in my name, I will do it," it is in the context of professing him as the way, the truth, and the life. When we pray to our Lord, we are not asking for our will to be done, but for his will to be done. That is where faith is rooted - not in our own desires or needs, but in our trust and belief in the Father's providence and care. Indeed, Jesus says, "I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son." God is glorified whenever faith is exhibited in its fullest measure by Jesus' disciples.

God is glorified when in our prayer life, we ask not our will be done, but God's will be done, and in doing so, we are able to discern the Spirit's presence through what we experience.

God is glorified when in our daily walk of faith, we seek not what is in our own best interest, but what is in the best interest of our fellow sister or brother in Christ, and in doing so, we witness Christ walking alongside us.

God is glorified when in our grief and loss, we are able to see our loved one residing in one of the many rooms that Jesus promised in his eternal home, and we live our lives here in anticipation of being reunited with the saints in the life which is to come.

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me." May we have the faith to trust, the courage to follow, and the freedom to respond in joy and gratitude, now and forevermore.

Thanks be to the living, loving God. Amen.