

Year A – 5th Sunday of Easter – 14 May 2017
Acts 7:55-60; 1 Peter 2:2-10; John 14:1-14

“If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.”

This seems to be such a powerful promise, but at the same time, it seems so very easy. Ask anything in Jesus’ name and he will do it. Wow! What a promise ... Seems almost too good to be true, doesn’t it? Ask anything in Jesus’ name and, presto, it’s done! That seems to fit into the mindset of our culture these days.

The other day I was at the local drug store, waiting for a prescription, so I was looking at their limited selection of books and novels. As I was glancing over the titles in the “bestsellers” section, I did a doubletake when I saw included a book by a pastor from Texas who has become quite the well-published author of so-called Christian Spirituality books that promise just what our Gospel speaks of today: ask anything in Jesus’ name and he will do it. I was gobsmacked, to say the least, that one of his books would find its way to the shelves of a store that only sells a limited number of books. Obviously, his message is very popular or the drug store wouldn’t carry his work, but I was taken aback nonetheless.

I must admit that I have intentionally limited my reading of this pastor’s work because I cannot swallow his understanding of the Gospel. It does not harmonize in any way, shape or form with the Gospel that I believe in. However, it is apparent that for millions of people worldwide, this particular slant on the Gospel has become quite popular and is becoming, unfortunately, quite mainstream.

This pastor unashamedly promotes a gospel of prosperity, in which, if you only believe hard enough, ask your Father God in just the right way, and “claim” the promise that if you ask anything in Jesus’ name, it will be done, that your life will be rich and fulfilling and bountiful. He seems to promote the idea that Jesus is the key to all you are looking for.

However, Jesus isn’t the key ... Jesus is the door ...

We live in a world that is rife with idolatry. We worship so many things, and Jesus tends to fall to the bottom of the list, if he makes the countdown at all.

Think about your week for a moment. When you wake up first thing in the morning, where does your mind go first? When you are driving down the road, what are you focussing on? When you choose what to watch on television or what book to read, what influences your choices? I know that my first thoughts in the morning are more along the line of “I don’t want to walk on the treadmill this morning” rather than “thank you, God, for a brand-new day”. When I am driving down the road I am not noticing the glory of God’s nature all around me but muttering about Haligonian driving techniques. When I sit down to watch TV or pick up a book to read, I am as apt to watch a drama or read a mystery because they are tools that take me away from where I am right now ... away from fatigue; away from worry; away from whatever challenge is lying ahead. I am more focussed on the tools that I find before me than I am on the One who stands before me and offers the way, the truth and the life.

After all, what is easier to pay attention to: the things that cause distraction or the One who calls me to rise above the distractions?

A few moments ago, I made a distinction between looking at Jesus as a key, as opposed to acknowledging Jesus as the door. While these two images are related, they are very different things altogether.

A key is something that unlocks what has been set aside from us. We lock things away to keep people away from them. We lock the doors to our homes so that strangers can not enter in. The key is just that first step in providing greater access, but even when we have the key, we are still on the outside of whatever was previously locked. A door, on the other hand, *is* the access. When we have access to the door, we are able, when we are ready, to simply go through it and enter into whatever lies behind it.

To think of Jesus as a key, is to think of him as simply a step toward where we want to be going. He provides the key but we still have to push open that door. The emphasis is on us. If we think about our relationship with God in that way, then Jesus simply becomes a tool we have used to get to where we want to end up. But that isn't the way of true faith. Jesus isn't simply a tool we use to get what we want. Jesus is the very door through which we are welcomed and encouraged to enter into what *God wants* for us, and for our lives.

I mentioned a few moments ago that we live in a world that is rife with idolatry. We really do. But there is something about idols that we need to keep in mind.

In the Biblical times, when the stone carvers and carpenters were busy making idols out of stone and wood, they weren't doing so while in some kind of spiritual frenzy or haze. They knew exactly what they were doing. They were creating something with their own two hands, using the tools that they had at their disposal. There may indeed have been a few craftsmen who truly believed that what they created by their own hands was indeed a god worthy of their worship, but I imagine that there were more of them who were cognizant that these tokens and trinkets that they were making and selling were no more powerful than the stone or the tree from which they were originally hewn. Those craftsmen were caught up, as our age is today, in the idea that to sell something as truth, to make it seem important and powerful, is as important as the thing itself, in the long run. With idols, in this day and age and way back when, it is not the fact of the item that is idolized, really, but rather the idea that goes with the item.

We don't worship money or cars or big houses in our world. We worship what we think they have come to stand for. We worship the idea ...

When we focus on the desire to have that which everyone else says is important, we continue to search for those ever-allusive keys that will unlock the potential for riches and acknowledgment and security that our world idolizes. But the keys, even if we do find them, don't open any locks that we actually find in our lives. We might have the key but we can't find the lock...

The problem lies in that which the theology of prosperity gurus has overlooked ... the door that we are trying to unlock doesn't need a key. There is no lock on the door into the Kingdom of God. There is simply a door that is waiting for us to lean up on and as soon as we do, it opens. Jesus is that door.

When we come face to face with the door to God's kingdom we can be stymied but only if we expect that, as the pastor from Texas reminds us, we have to do the right thing, ask the

right question, lean on our own understanding and good works. When we finally remember that Jesus has told us to place our trust in him, to lean on him, then we find out that incredible truth that Jesus is *most certainly not the key, the tool, to get ourselves into heaven*, but rather Jesus is the door that opens as soon as we lean upon him.

Once we place our trust in him and stop expecting that we are the keepers of our own salvation, then we find that not only has the door been opened before us, but we are welcomed in to our Father's house in which we find that a place has already been prepared for us.

Yes, Jesus does tell us that if in his name we ask for anything, he will do it, but first we need to acknowledge that Jesus is not simply a key that unlocks our access to what we desire, but rather he is the door through which we will find that which we have always really been searching for. When we shift our thoughts of Jesus from key to door, our perception and understanding of what we might want to ask for in Jesus' name changes drastically.

We could ask that we might be given the riches of this world or we could enter through the door and give thanks that we have been freely given the riches of God's world ...