

Reflections from a United Methodist Pastor

December 27, 2020

Lesson 4

The Father Dwells in Jesus

John 14:8-14

Once when I was a little boy, I prayed that I'd make a 100 on my third-grade arithmetic test. (Let's just say that I made less than that.) Another time, I prayed that I'd learn how to be a ventriloquist. (Let's just say that at least I got a sore throat.) Then there was the time I prayed that "Stinker" Clark—yes, that is what we called him—would let me play with his baseball glove. (Let's just say that catching bare-handed is a developed skill.)

Okay. Was God zero for three on those prayers? John 14:13-14 reports that Jesus said, "You ask for it and I'll do it." Well, that's not exactly what our Lord said. He said, "I will do whatever you ask for in my name, so that the Father can be glorified in the Son. When you ask me for anything in my name, I will do it." That means the prayer is to be in the spirit of love, in the grace of forgiveness, in the insistence on justice, in the purposes of God, in the gift of relationship, in the character and will of Jesus, in the advancement of the kingdom, in the pursuit of peace, in the integrity of witness.

No wonder the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray (Luke 11:1)! No wonder the apostle Paul acknowledged that we "don't know what we should pray" (Romans 8:26)! The writer of Lamentations knew what it is like to feel a prayer is unanswered (Lamentations 3:8).

Jesus is not suggesting that prayer is a kind of divine order blank. Rather, prayer becomes a conversation, and God and the one who prays talk about what is best. Even Jesus himself was moved to pray, "Not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42, KJV). So, a prayer can be said to be answered even though we don't get what we wanted. Prayer is one way we say that we know that God is in charge. Prayer is one way the believer can get on the same sheet of music as our Lord.

In case the disciples had missed the point, Jesus in these verses is making it clear that he and the Father (and the Holy Spirit to come—John 14:16) are cut out of the same piece of cloth. And God created the cloth and God did the cutting! To pray in Jesus' name is to open ourselves to the Trinitarian reality of God.

Prayer: As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name."

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