

**In Jesus' Name**  
**The Reverend Debbie Cook, Grace Church in Haddonfield**  
**Fifth Sunday of Easter, Revised Common Lectionary, Year A**  
**April 20, 2008**

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

If only it were that easy.

We say a lot of prayers, asking things in the name of Jesus, or through Jesus. Our collects, our Eucharistic prayers, our personal prayers. And yet, we know that this isn't some magic formula that guarantees that our requests will automatically be fulfilled. If that were the case, the world would be a much different place—perhaps full of lottery winners, little girls with ponies, and world peace. Now that would be nice. However, people tend to pray for all sorts of conflicting things, and how do you, even as God, resolve that? No, it appears that there has to be something more to it than just adding a tag line to our even most fervent prayers.

Asking for things in the name of Jesus is, in fact, about even more than keeping our prayer requests within what we perceive as the will of God—love, healing, wholeness, restoration. For this line, and the ones preceding it, are about relationship-- the relationship between the Son and the Father, between Jesus and us, about us and God. They are about seeing with new eyes, perceiving with the heart rather than just the senses. They are about identity—Jesus' and ours.

Jesus states to his disciples that if you know him, you know the Father also. Philip, ever practical Philip, just does not get it. To him, this is Jesus—a man of God, to be sure; but still a man—and not the Father. Surely God the Father has to be bigger, grander, more luminous, more disembodied. God the Father, in Philip's mind, does not just show up on earth and mix and mingle with the common and the lowly. So how can Jesus say that if you know him, you know

**In Jesus' Name**  
**The Reverend Debbie Cook, Grace Church in Haddonfield**  
**Fifth Sunday of Easter, Revised Common Lectionary, Year A**  
**April 20, 2008**

the Father—and have seen him? It just doesn't seem possible. So Philip pulls a Jerry McGuire moment, and says, 'show us the Father'.

You can almost see Jesus slapping his forehead: "Have you been with me all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me?" How disappointing, how frustrating for Jesus. Philip (and, I suspect, the others) have failed to fully perceive who Jesus is, and as a result, are still seeking that which is right in front of them: God incarnate, fully present and accessible. Jesus shows forth God's very character, God's commitment to healing, wholeness, restoration. Through the work and words of Jesus, God reveals God's hospitality and abundance, God's compassion and mercy, God's never failing, unending love. This is only possible because of relationship: Jesus' total obedience and absolute trust in the Father mean that no obstacles lie between them. Jesus does nothing without the Father, and all that the Father says and does is evident in Jesus' life and ministry. They are One--one heart, one mind, one being. To know Jesus is to know the Father, to see Jesus is to see the Father.

How is it then that Philip, who has traveled and lived with Jesus for some time now, fails to perceive all this? He has seen the miracles, heard the teaching; and yet, he is blinded. Perhaps he lacks the trust and faith to enter into an open relationship with his Lord. Around the edges of Philip's heart lies fear—fear of where this all going, fear that this will all come to a terrible end and that he will be caught up in it. He wants assurance, almost seeking proof of all Jesus has said. All of these things place obstacles between himself and his Lord, creating barriers to clearer

**In Jesus' Name**  
**The Reverend Debbie Cook, Grace Church in Haddonfield**  
**Fifth Sunday of Easter, Revised Common Lectionary, Year A**  
**April 20, 2008**

vision, to a fuller relationship with Jesus—the Son—and the Father. The Oneness that Philip and the others are called to is not to be until their eyes and hearts are opened, post-resurrection.

We are called to the same Oneness with our Lord. We are baptized into his death and resurrection; we come to the table to enter into communion with Christ. And yet, if we are honest with ourselves, we know we too erect obstacles in the way. We sometimes choose to not fully embrace the forgiveness and love we are given so freely. The grace and acceptance that is offered is life changing, and change is rarely comfortable. This change can lead to fear—fear of changing, fear of asking, fear of being dependent on that whom we cannot control or physically grasp. Our self-will rears its head, refusing to freely trust our lives to the One alone who is worthy of that trust. We can easily start thinking it's all about us—and forget that it's really all about God. Our intended intimate relationship with our Lord becomes muddled and distant.

Thankfully, we have a Lord who is loath to leave to us to our own devices. Each time we lay a brick in the separation wall of our relationship, our God seeks a way to prod us to remove it, reaching out to us through the love and witness of others as well as the circumstances of our lives. We can choose to keep laying the bricks or pull them down, but our Lord will not rest until the last brick has been kicked aside and intimacy has been restored. The master builder is one of bridges that connect and doorways that open, not walls that divide.

It is in that relationship of knowing Jesus and being known that we can discover how to ask in the name of Jesus. This is not about right formula, right belief, or believing enough. It is about knowing God's love and being willing to be vulnerable for the sake of the One who became

**In Jesus' Name**  
**The Reverend Debbie Cook, Grace Church in Haddonfield**  
**Fifth Sunday of Easter, Revised Common Lectionary, Year A**  
**April 20, 2008**

vulnerable for us. It is about being open to the direction and will of God, no matter where it takes us—and having confidence that God knows the way better than we do. Our relationship with our Lord is to be one of dependence and fidelity and trust. It is then that we can perceive Jesus as the ‘way, the truth, and the life’, knowing that every aspect of our lives is caught up in his, and that asking in his name is a way to honor that, and glorify God.

Stephen, from today’s reading from Acts, understood this. Considered to be one of the church’s first deacons, Stephen was ‘full of grace and power’ doing ‘great wonders and signs among the people’. When called before the authorities and falsely accused, he responded with a lengthy and stirring speech of witness to the glory of God, ending with chastising the council for opposing the Holy Spirit. Though he died for his powerful words and witness, his life is a reflection of glory of God; like the moon reflecting the light of the sun, so did his life shine by the light of Christ.

We, too, are asked to light bearers, reflecting the love and mercy of God in a troubled and suspicious world. Even though many of us will not be as renowned as Stephen, our lives and ministries are and always will be of infinite value to God. It matters not where we live out our lives of relationship to our Lord, only that we do. Each day, let us be reminded into whose Body we are baptized, whose work we are called to do, whose love we are asked to live out in our lives.

All this I do ask in Jesus’ name.

**In Jesus' Name**  
**The Reverend Debbie Cook, Grace Church in Haddonfield**  
**Fifth Sunday of Easter, Revised Common Lectionary, Year A**  
**April 20, 2008**

Amen.