

One evening a grasshopper walked into a bar. The bartender was shocked. It was not every night that a grasshopper came into his bar. The insect hopped across the room, and jumped onto a stool. The bartender walked over to the grasshopper and said, “Well, isn’t this something, a grasshopper! You know we have a drink named after you?”

The grasshopper looked at the bartender and replied, “Why would anybody want to name a drink Irving?”

Names are a funny thing. They are more than just monikers. Oftentimes a name, particularly a nickname, can tell us something about a person. How a person is addressed can be considered a token of respect, or disrespect.

It is still not uncommon for us to change our names when a significant event occurs. Not only after a marriage is a name changed, but monks, and nuns take on new names as a part of their new vocation. This is to mark the gravity of the decision they have made.

In the ancient Near East, during the lifetime of Jesus, names had great importance. They were often understood to speak of a person’s character, even nature. Parents would choose names in response to the events surrounding the child’s birth, in praise of God, or even to mark a national event. The Old Testament tells us many stories about the significance of a person’s name.

But a name was also a symbol of authority. It was a way of speaking a person’s endorsement, or approval. We all know that one of the Ten Commandments is not to take the Lord’s name in vain. To speak the name of God frivolously is to show disrespect for God’s power, and authority.

And so when Jesus tells us this morning that whatever we ask for in his name will be done, he is telling us more than just how to

get God to listen to our requests. He is speaking about our very relationship with him.

Perhaps no other teaching of Jesus concerning prayer has been so misunderstood. It is very common for us to end our prayers with the phrase, “in Jesus’ name.” I often wonder if such a phrase has come to be seen as a sort of incantation; as though if we add those words our prayers are made more effective. Or, perhaps it has simply become a formula; a set of words that all proper, and formal prayers should employ.

In either case the meaning behind Jesus’ teaching has been missed. When Jesus spoke these words—that whatever we ask in his name he will do—I believe he was speaking a profound, and moving truth about the nature of prayer.

Prayer is not simply a reciting before the Almighty our needs, and concerns, as if we must remind God of them. Instead prayer is a conduit, a means of communication between God, and us where we are renewed, and reminded that we live, and move, and have our being within God alone.

The power of prayer is not that the Spirit of God is a whirlwind that moves through our lives on command to set right what is wrong, and to heal all that is amiss. Instead the subtle, profound, and renewing power of prayer is that the quiet, diligent, loving Spirit of God is present. Prayer does not set God to work, it places us in the reality that God has always been at work.

Now certainly God is active, and able to perform miracles in our lives. I have seen God’s hand at work in my own life, and in the lives of others. I have seen such miracles occur in the wake of intentional prayer, as well as in the unbidden, seeming coincidences of providence. But regardless of the impetus that

brings about the miraculous, it all means nothing without the connection to God as our keeper, and sustainer.

It is more important for us to know our Lord; and I know of no other way to engage God than through the formative practice of regular, disciplined prayer. We know that the strength of any relationship rests on its level of communication. The same is true with God. How can we know, and love a God that we never seek to know, and love?

That is the life of prayer, and that is prayer in Jesus' name. Jesus was the Word made flesh, God incarnate, the union of God, and humans. What other prayer can there be in Jesus' name than a life that seeks to live into the fullness of the union of God, and humans?

We say our prayers in Jesus' name. But we also live, and breathe in Jesus' name. We love, and serve in Jesus' name. The life of prayer is the life that challenges us to grow deeper into the awareness that everything we do, all that we are, and all that we are called to be can be done in Jesus' name. Prayer is not just the words we say in Jesus' name, it is also the life we live.