

Show Us the Father

John 14:8-17 (25-27)

Were you; or are you the person who dares to ask the question in the classroom or the board meeting? You know... that question that everyone wants the answer to, but everyone else is too insecure to ask. Or you are afraid that everyone may know the answer but you, and by asking the question you will be ridiculed or laughed at.

Our passage is located in the heart of the first half of the Farewell Discourse in John. The author describes a final dialogue between Jesus and his disciples; perhaps it is better described as a monologue with prompts from his disciples. This particular passage begins with Philip's prompting to "show us the Father." It follows a statement of Jesus about his ultimate destiny of going to the Father and his desire to take the disciples with him, "so that where I am, there you may be also" (14:3). Thomas interrupted Jesus after he said, "You know the way to the place where I am going," by asking, "How can we know the way?" (14:5). Then Jesus said his famous, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" saying and stated that the disciples have seen the Father. **Stephen P. Ahearne-Kroll**

The real and primary concern of the passage was not seeing God, but the intimacy of Jesus' relationship with God and what that meant for Jesus' followers. So what Philip got in response to his question was a discourse on the relationship between the Father and the Son, and this led to the promise of the Paraclete/Advocate; the Holy Spirit. This promise of divine power was and is also a promise that this powerful presence would enable disciples of Jesus to accomplish great things. When we think of "great things," too often we think of what we call miracles; but an objective look should show us that the followers of

Jesus have actually accomplished more than he could. Jesus was limited in space and time—one person at one relatively small place in one brief lifetime; but his many followers have gone around the world for 2,000 years, healing, comforting, converting, and generally making life better for people. There have, of course, been negative outcomes too; but by and large the church of Jesus Christ has brought the presence and power of God to bear on the plight of humanity. As long as we can do it in the name of Jesus and for the glory of God, our works of love will be a positive influence in the world. **Bruce E. Shields**

So our scripture is really about the Holy Spirit. Philip's request to be shown the Father (v. 8) is really the question: Just how is God to be known? The answer given by Jesus was that he is the way to the truth of God and the life of God (v. 7). He is "in the Father" just as the Father is in him (vv. 10a, 11a). The Holy Spirit is the subject of our Pentecost feast. There Jesus promised that the Father would send the Holy Spirit as advocate or intercessor. He is the Paraclete or the Spirit of truth, and Jesus promised that this counselor would "be with you; *the disciples; and us* forever." Jesus assured the disciples that the Father would send the Spirit "in Jesus' name." Part of the job of the Holy Spirit is to teach you [the disciples and us] everything, and remind them of all that Jesus had said to them." As the disciples passed the sayings of Jesus to others, who passed it on to others, the Holy Spirit has keep the saying clear and given understanding through the generations.

Another of the Holy Spirit's tasks is the work of comfort, since comfort is the issue that frames the entire passage. Jesus began this dialogue with the disciples by commanding them not to allow their hearts to be troubled, and he ended it with the same command. (14:1, 27b) The disciples were troubled because Jesus had announced both his own death and that of Peter (13:36). To the disciples, an announcement of that sort meant the triumph of Satan and their own bereavement. What would happen when Jesus, the founder of the community, was no longer

around? Would the community left on its own, with no access to his presence or transformative power? The author of John's Gospel and our observance of the Day of Pentecost respond to that concern by reminding the community of Jesus' assurance that, when he had gone, another Advocate would come, "the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name" (v. 26).

The comfort Jesus offered was another *paraklētos* like himself who would be with them. Jesus would be present with the disciples through the Spirit. In a real sense he would live in them even though he was absent in body (14:18-19). The Spirit is a comforter because, through the Spirit, Jesus, though he is now with the Father in glory, still stands alongside the disciples and alongside us.

Like Philip (v. 9): the Christian community of the disciples, despite having been privy to the story of Jesus, having heard his teaching, and having been a guest at his table, either does not "know" Jesus, has not begun to fathom how he is the essential and ultimate disclosure of "the Father," or is in danger of amnesia, of forgetting what at one time it did know. Thus the promise of the presence of "the Spirit of truth," who is in the community and who "will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you" (v. 26). The Spirit's presence served to remind the disciples of all that Jesus taught them and to explain to them the meaning of all that Jesus had said and done (v. 26b). The Paraclete does not teach new truths or do things clearly different from the sorts of things Jesus had done. The presence of the Paraclete brings *Jesus* to mind, and it is *Jesus* who is the way, the truth, and the life. The Paraclete is the Spirit of truth; that is, the Spirit always bears witness to Jesus, who is the truth. Karl Barth reminds us: "... the Holy Spirit distinguishes himself from any other spirit by his absolute identity with the person and work of Christ. ... All that is Spirit proceeds from Jesus and results in him." The Spirit has come to us to teach and reinforce only what Jesus himself taught and did.

Jesus asked the Father, who is Spirit (4:24), to send the Spirit in his (that is, Jesus') name (14:16, 26), so that through the Spirit he will remain always in and with the disciples (14:18-19). We, disciples in every age need not be troubled by the physical absence of Jesus or by the tribulations we might face in his name or by the sense that we are left alone. Our hearts are not to be troubled, precisely because Jesus has asked the Father to send us a Paraclete who will be with us, who will teach us all things about Christ, and who will bring Christ to our remembrance.

Philip Turner

The proper focus on this Day of Pentecost is surely the promise of the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit within the Christian community. Jesus wants the ongoing community of disciples to have confidence that, because of the presence of the Advocate, there is not, and will not be, any loss of the presence or power of Jesus.

More than a mere recollection is involved. The community is helped both to remember all that Jesus has said—the totality of his teaching, the hard as well as the more comfortable parts—and to discover what it all means in the constantly changing circumstances in which the church finds itself. How critically important it is for us, the community of faith, to hear and trust the promise: when it comes to the meaning of Jesus' life and teaching, the community can expect new conviction and fresh clarity.

In our teaching and worship —whether with children, with newcomers to the community of faith, or with those who have been around for a long time—the church tells the story of Jesus and calls to mind his teaching. But it is the Spirit of truth who aids the community to "know" what the story means and to make connections between the old, familiar (and sometimes unfamiliar) words and the new reality. In the church the story is rehearsed, and, because of the presence of the Spirit of truth, all that Jesus has said comes alive. But remembering is not

remembrance for its own sake, not even remembrance that leads to fuller understanding. Remembering is for the sake of *faithfulness*. Our community's life is obedient to Jesus, a community that proves our love for Jesus by keeping his commandments (v. 15). John taught that it is within obedient Christian communities that the Spirit comes (vv. 15-16; see also v. 23); and apart from the presence of the Spirit of truth, it is all too easy, in times of testing (whether externally, as in 9/11, or internally, as when we fight among ourselves and threaten to tear ourselves apart), for the Christian community to forget the teaching and example of its Lord and fall into cowardly silence or outright disobedience.

Jesus encourages us to form a community of believing and obedient people, a community that is confident in the disclosure of God that has come in the person of Jesus and that depends on the leadership of the Spirit of truth to keep it obedient and productive in its life. True Christian community will not be satisfied being a social club of friends, but will be led to do "works" similar to those of Jesus: befriending the outcasts, healing the sick, speaking up for the marginalized, housing the homeless, feeding the hungry, and speaking truth to and about the empire. Because we, the community remembers, because we are helped by the Spirit to "know" our Lord, because it is obedient to Jesus' commands, because it is doing his works, and because of the presence and power of the Spirit in our life together, we will be a nonanxious presence in an anxious, fearful age; we will have the peace the world cannot give (v. 27) or take away.

So, brothers and sisters, keep asking questions! Today is Pentecost, the birthday of the church. This is the day to help us be more in touch with the concerns of the people who gather to celebrate this day, and more encouraging to be a community that seeks direction and empowerment to be faithful. **Eugene C. Bay** It is our responsibility, with the power of the Holy Spirit, to show the world both Jesus and the Father.

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