

Show Me the Father

Fifth Sunday of Easter, Year A – John 14:1-14

preached at St. Paul's, Henderson, May 18, 2014

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

Alleluia! The Lord is risen. *The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

Philip is one of those characters in the Scriptures that we don't know too much about. In the list of disciples, Philip rates a little higher in name recognition than, say Thaddeus or one of the others who only appear as entries on the list of disciples. But he's no where near the inner circle, the big three: Peter, James and John. Yet here he is, the pivotal foil in today's Gospel lesson because it seems that he just doesn't get it. Since *Easter*, our Gospel lessons have pointed to one person after another who doesn't recognize what's going on with Jesus. And here we go *again*, this time with Thomas and with Philip. Thomas we've already heard from this season as he refused to believe until he saw Jesus' scars. But what about Philip?

I mean, just reading this story, I get a bit embarrassed for him. Oh, to be fair, I suppose, we have to remember that our text this week takes us back *before* Jesus' death and resurrection, so maybe Philip is a bit less clueless than his buddy Tom – but *still*. After having followed Jesus all this time, having lived day after day with him and the others for three long years of ministry, after all that, how could Philip still not understand? Here they are, all the disciples gathered to celebrate the Passover with their master for what *we* know will be the last time. Jesus is getting into some *very* heavy teaching about his imminent departure from them. And right at that moment, right there in verse eight, when Philip is about to open his mouth, I just want to step in and stop him. "Philip, don't do it!" "What are you thinking?" "Don't ask a question to which you *should* already know the answer!" But it's too late, out come those words, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied."

Almost every commentary agrees: on this occasion, Philip is blind to who he is with – he just doesn't see Jesus for who he really is. But I have a hard time buying that conclusion. I think something else is going on. We don't see too much of Philip in the Scriptures, but the few times we *do* see him, Philip is always portrayed in a *positive* light. He usually seems to understand the importance of Jesus' mission pretty well. In fact, while others go off on tangents at various points in their journey with the master, Philip holds firm. Philip stays the course. Philip remains a steady keel among the twelve.

We first meet Philip when he is picked out by Jesus, called to be one of his earliest followers. Philip is so convinced of Jesus' role in human history, so excited about being a part of the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven, that he runs out and finds his friend Nathaniel, and convinces *him* to come along as well. Nathaniel had his own objections, but that's another story. Philip pulled and tugged and persuaded his friend to set aside his doubts and, "Come and see."

By the time we hear from Philip again, Jesus has become, to put it mildly, an *extremely* popular preacher in the Galilean countryside. One day in particular, a huge crowd came out to hear Jesus. Depending where in the Gospels you look, it may have been four thousand, or it may have been five thousand, or it may have been five thousand *men* plus all the women and children. In any case, as evening approached, it was level headed Philip that brought the rather serious problem of dining arrangements to Jesus' attention, pointing the way to the miracle that we all know about.

Then there's the very first incidence of the Gospel message being shared with Gentiles. Some "Greeks" wanted to know what was going on, what all the fuss was about, what this Jesus could be up to. They didn't feel they had the right to approach Jesus directly (not being Jews, they probably *didn't*.) But Philip, in his eagerness to show *everyone* the wonderful treasure he had found urged them to step closer and see for themselves what God was doing in and through this Jesus.

Philip's the one who brought all those people to Jesus. He's the first one who was able to articulate just who Jesus was. He's the first to invite others along the path, the first to say, "Come and

see!” Maybe instead of being blind as all those commentaries say, Philip sees the occasion all *too* clearly. Philip is looking to see the Father. Maybe he sees that this is his final opportunity. Maybe he sees clearly how little time is left. Maybe he sees well enough to ask the one he knows for sure can show him.

I must admit that after a lifetime in the Church in one capacity or another, after years of Bible study, after three years of seminary and years in the pulpit, I want the same thing as Philip: I want to see the Father. I want to know and be known by the one who is *everything*. I want to be able to be face to face with the one who created me, with the one who redeemed me, with the one who sustains me. But in all my searching, no one – no individual, no group, no institution – has shown me the Father. Because no one could.

You see, those of us here today have the same problem as Philip had way back then: we are *lost*. On our own, there is no *way* for us to see the Father. On our own, there is *no* way to take even a single step toward the Father. On our own, we are forever doomed to separation from the Father. *No* one can show us the Father. We have no claim, we have no basis, we have no ground in ourselves to even ask the question.

Through all the years of searching, I have not been shown the Father. But over the years I have had a good *many* people show me *Jesus*. I think of my mother, telling the stories over and over and over again – in the basement Sunday School room, in the rare quiet time just before bed, in the un-air-conditioned station wagon barreling from Ohio to Arizona. I think of Pastor Dean Freed, who in the midst of storms within me that he never even knew about, spoke peace to my troubled thirteen year old heart. I think of many of *you* who have ministered to me in countless ways over these last two years as you have allowed me to minister to you. In response to my searching to see the Father, each of these, each of *you*, has shown me Jesus Christ. And in Christ I *have* seen the Father.

Philip isn't being blind in this morning's Gospel lesson. He isn't being stupid. He isn't sticking his foot in his mouth. In asking *Jesus* to show the Father, Philip leads us back to the Father of all that is, seen *and* unseen. And here in Philip we have *our* model for bringing others to see the saving grace that has brought us back face to face with the Father: not high-sounding pronouncements or low-expectations platitudes, but by simply showing forth the *love of Christ*.

Look to your right and to your left – do you see Christ in your neighbor? Maybe that's not all that hard. After all, we who have gathered here this morning are like-minded folk. But let me tell you, we will have a hard time reaching past our own little chiche to show the Father to the people who most desperately need to see him if we cannot see the face of Christ in the seemingly *least* loveable, if we cannot see the face of Christ in the one who is *least* like us, if we cannot see the face of Christ in the one with whom we have the *least* in common, in the face of the one with whom we disagree most fervently. If we are to be evangelists, tellers of the Good News of Jesus Christ, we need to cultivate the faculty to see the face of Christ, the true image of the everlasting Father, not just in the best and the brightest, not just in the ones that hold our same views and opinions and interpretations, not just in those we see as somehow *worthy* of our regard, but in *every* face.

And maybe here's the real hard part – look again to your right and to your left – does your neighbor see Christ in *you*? If we are to be evangelists, tellers of the Good News of Jesus Christ, we need to let the love of Christ that has saved us and made us whole radiate from us in all that we think, and in all that we say, and in all that we do. This side of Christ's victory over death, we have a story to tell, you and I: that the living God of all creation, the longing pursuer of our souls, the loving Father of us all, has loved us with so great and so wide and so deep a love that he came to be among us and died for us and rose for us. It is *that* story that should *drive* us. It is *that* story that should *empower* us. It is *that* story that should *consume* us, until it cannot help but show through to those who look to *us* to see Christ.

“Show us the Father and we will be satisfied,” Philip said. And Jesus spread his arms wide on the cross, and wider still from the mouth of an empty tomb, and showed us just that.

Alleluia! Christ is risen. *The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!*