

Mother's Day 2020: Ps 31 1-5, 15-16; Acts 7: 55-60; 1 Peter 2: 2-10; **Sermon text: John 14 1-14**

“If you have seen me you have seen the Father”

What is that the disciples have seen?

First, some context: The disciples probably feel a mixture confusion and anxiety, uncertain and worried about the future as it seems that Jesus is telling them he's going to be leaving.

Jesus has just predicted his betrayal (Jn 13: 21), Judas Iscariot has left dramatically (Jn 13: 27) , Jesus has told them he is going somewhere they cannot yet go (Jn 13: 33), and warned Peter that he will deny his Lord not once but three times (Jn 13: 38).

I suspect that Jesus is more than just a little bit exasperated with his hapless followers. They have spent the last three years with him yet appear to have been following without watching; perhaps *watching without seeing*.

Thomas bluntly says what everyone's thinking: “We don't know where you are going so how can we know the way?” (Jn 14: 5). If we were to put that in contemporary language: “What on earth are you going on about?” Philip caps it by saying: “Lord show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” (Jn 14: 8).

If he was like me when my children seem to be particularly obfuscatory, I can imagine Jesus thinking: “Excuse me, but just who do you think I am and what exactly do you think I've been doing for the last three years?”

I suspect you can hear that tinge of exasperation in what he actually *does* say, which is something like: “Don't you know me Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’ Don't you believe that I am in the Father and that the Father is in me.... At least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves?” (v 9ff).

It seems that the disciples are guilty of being supremely obtuse because Jesus is a classic example of “WYSIWYG”: What you see is what you get, *no* fine print, *no* Ts and Cs apply.

So, he tells his disciples: **“If you have seen me you have seen the Father”**.

If you know me, you know what God is like. From now on, Jesus says, you do know God and you have seen God. Whoever has seen me has seen God.

Some Biblical scholars say that this passage is the absolute heart of the theology of John’s gospel. It spells out the *incarnation*: God made flesh.

Jesus doesn’t say: “If you have seen me you have seen a close approximation of God the Father/an image or likeness of the Father/ something kind-of like the Father might be”. He says: “If you have seen me you have seen the Father.” That’s it, all there is to it, a statement of fact. *WYSIWYG: What you see is what you get*.

Because the disciples have seen Jesus, they should have known at least a bit about what God is like and who God is: Loving, just, compassionate, merciful and self-giving.

In *Tokens of Trust*, Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury makes the point that in Jesus God shows us that God is trustworthy. Throughout his ministry Jesus has consistently shown that he is not out to further his own ends and willing to deceive people in order to do so, as many secular leaders seem to be. He has shown that he is firmly and supremely on our side, working for our good, as Williams puts it: “We’re looking in the same direction, working with the same hopes and the same assumptions.”

But that’s not to deny or downplay the riskiness of trusting God – it was a big ask for the disciples and it can be a big ask for us too.

The disciples are befuddled, bemused and, not surprisingly, in a bit of a state. They’re worried about where Jesus is going and what’s going to happen to them. Jesus’ answer to them is so infuriatingly simple isn’t it?

“I am the way. I am the way, the truth and the life. If you want to get to God, you get there by me.” It’s so simple.

“You don’t have to know the way as long as you know that **I know** the way”, he says, “Just follow me. Even if you don’t know where I am going, if you follow me you will end up where I am going. But you’ve got to trust me enough to follow.”

What he doesn't say, but what is implied and what this weighty phrase hinges on is: "If you have seen me, *really* seen me, then you have seen the Father and you *know* that I, that he, that we, we can be trusted. You can trust us. You can trust us with everything that is most precious to you, including your life."

"If you have seen me you have seen the Father"

So, this short phrase is pregnant with significance and raises a question for us:

What do **we** see when we look at Christ? Are we watching, looking...? *really seeing?*

The way we perceive of God; how we see, and what we see, are affected by our life context, prejudices, perspectives, experiences and expectations. That is a key word to think about because it was probably central to the disciples' seeming inability to see.

All their experience of Jesus, their upbringing as Jews, all the miracles that they witnessed Jesus carry out, should have equipped them to understand a little more of what he was about. So perhaps it was their expectations that clouded their vision, tripped them up. They expected a triumphant Messiah, a Saviour King who would restore Israel to its rightful place. Jesus wasn't what they expected at all.

In my experience, God often isn't what we expect or even what we think we need or want.

A frivolous illustration of this is the joke that you have probably heard: A man and his dog are trapped on the roof by rising flood waters, so he prays fervently: "God please save me." A neighbour in a rubber duck comes by and offers to rescue him but he declines: "I am waiting for God to save me". Next, a police speed boat arrives and the dog, knowing a good thing, leaps off the roof and paddles to the boat and is hauled to safety. The man declines again, waiting for God to save him. Then a helicopter hovers overhead and hails the man but he refuses again: "No, I am waiting for God to save me." He drowns, of course. When he gets to heaven and demands to know from God: "Why didn't you save me?" God replies: "I tried three times. Why did you ignore all the help I sent you?"

In this strange Corona country we inhabit, it isn't surprising if we feel something like the disciples did: A mixture confusion and anxiety, uncertainty and worry about the future. May we be encouraged to draw some comfort from the Gospel passage today and from Williams' assertion that we can trust God, no matter what our circumstances. Jesus says to us, just as he said to those fearful disciples:

"You don't have to know the way as long as you know that **I know** the way. Just follow me. ... trust me enough to follow."

References

NIV Study Bible; Seasons of the Spirit online; *Tokens of Trust*, Rowan Williams, WJK Press, 2007; Nathan Nettleton, © LaughingBird.net

Mother's Day Prayer

From the Chaplain to the Order of St Lazarus of Jerusalem, sent by David Robinson

Dear God,
You formed and knitted us in our mothers' wombs,
We give thanks for the sanctification of human, married and family life.
We especially celebrate mothers; our mothers, new mothers, mothers-to-be, grandmothers and great grandmothers.
We intercede for those who long to be mothers but cannot conceive. We pray for those who have lost children – before birth, at birth and after birth.
We pray for women and mothers who suffer violence and abuse, and for the trauma heightened by our current enforced community isolation.
We give thanks for Mary, mother of Jesus who let it be done for her according to your will and who pondered many things in her heart.
May this Mother's Day throughout our world be your moment, our God, to renew and sanctify us all in heart, mind, spirit and hope for the new day dawning.
Bless all mothers this day, and thank you for those who now, upon another shore and in a greater light, behold you face to face. Amen