

**“Seeing the Father”**  
**John 14:8-11**  
**July 19, 2020**  
**Faith Presbyterian Church – Morning Service**  
*Pastor Nicoletti*

We return again this morning to the Gospel of John.

We will be looking at chapter fourteen. Jesus is still gathered with his disciples (all expect for Judas, who has left them), after the Passover. Jesus has just told his disciples that he is the way, the truth, and the life, and that it is only through him that they can come to God the Father, but that because of him they can both know and see the Father.

Which leads Philip, one of his disciples, to ask a question.

With that in mind we come to John chapter fourteen, verses eight through eleven.

Please listen carefully, for this is God’s Word for us this morning.

<sup>14:8</sup> Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” <sup>9</sup> Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? <sup>10</sup> Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. <sup>11</sup> Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.

This is the word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.)

“All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.” [1 Peter 1:24-25]

Let’s pray ...

Lord, we ask that by your Spirit the words of my mouth  
and the meditation of all of our hearts  
would be acceptable in your sight, O Lord,  
our rock and our redeemer. Amen.  
[Based on Psalm 19:14]

This morning we come to an important text on how we know – how we “see” – God the Father. And I think there are four things for us to consider from our text. This morning, when it comes to knowing the Father, our text calls us to consider: desire, division, replacements, and repentance. Desire, division, replacements, and repentance.

That is what we will be considering this morning.

We start with “desire.” And we might put it as a question: “What does Philip desire? And what should we make of it?”

Philip says to Jesus: “Lord, show us the Father, and that is enough for us.” Philip’s desire is to see – to know, to behold – God, his heavenly Father.

And that is a good thing. In fact, it is a good thing that is present to some degree in the heart of every human being – because that is how God made us.

When God created the first human beings – our first parents – he placed them in paradise, and he dwelt with them there. As Genesis three describes, he himself was present in the Garden and so Adam and Eve had perfect fellowship with God their Father. They knew him. They saw him. They were made for that kind of relationship with him.

Unfortunately, they also rebelled against him. But even after our first parents rebelled, even after they were cast out of the Garden and away from the presence of God, that desire for God’s presence never left them. It was twisted, yes; it was misdirected, yes; it was always in conflict with the new sinful desire in their hearts to flee from God’s presence, yes. But still the desire remained – the desire to be with God, the desire to know God, the desire to see the Father.

And our first parents passed that desire on to every one of their descendants. It is written in each human being’s heart. Because it is a core part of how we are designed.

God has “made us for [Himself], and our hearts are restless until they rest in [Him].” – as Augustine put it. [*Confessions* I,1,1]

And deep down, every one of us knows this.

You know this if you are a Christian. You know that when you accept and embrace this desire to know – to in some way see – God your Father, then your spiritual life grows and flourishes. You know that when you try to push aside and ignore this desire ... or when you begin to doubt that this desire will ever be satisfied – you know that that is when your spiritual life stalls, or stagnates, or otherwise falters. You know that deep inside, what you most need, is to know – to see – God your Father.

But you also, *on some level*, must know this even if you are not a Christian this morning. Because you too were made for God. And as long as you deny that, as long as you refuse to seek or embrace the thing you were made for, your heart will remain restless, and discontent, and incomplete.

Maybe you keep looking to fill that desire with other things ... but again and again they disappoint. Maybe you are trying to accept that restlessness as a part of life. Maybe you are trying to distract yourself from the ache you feel – the incompleteness you feel – using worldly distractions.

But either way, the desire remains. And Philip in our passage names it. He says to Jesus: “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.”

And the second half of that statement is also important. It’s not just that Philip desires to see the Father, but that he *knows* that seeing – that knowing – God the Father *would be enough* for them. He knows it would be sufficient.

And wherever you are spiritually this morning, the same is true for you. God, your Father, has made you to know him, and your heart's deepest desire is to know him, and if you truly and fully knew him, it really would be enough for you – in a way that nothing else in this life has been enough, or even can be enough.

That is the desire that Philip begins with – and it is our desire as well: We desire to know – to see – God our Father.

Which leads to our second point, and to the question: If we desire to see and to know God ... then why don't we? Why haven't we already?

Is the problem in us, for failing to see? Or is the problem in God for failing to reveal himself to us?

We should note that Philip seems to imply that the problem is with God. Philip's request is sincere, and rooted in a good desire, but there is an implied critique in it.

To say, "Show us the Father," is also to say, "because he hasn't shown himself to us yet." It is to imply that the problem isn't with us, but the problem is with God – our desire is right and good, but God is failing to meet it.

And Jesus replies with what we might call a gentle rebuke [Morris, 643]. He replies by answering Philip's desire, and correcting his criticism of the Father.

Beginning in verse nine, Jesus says: "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? <sup>10</sup> Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. <sup>11</sup> Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves."

Jesus tells Philip that God the Father *has* revealed himself – most notably in him: in Jesus, his Son – but Philip has failed to see it, because he has made a division between Jesus and the Father.

And we are often guilty of the same thing.

If you're not a Christian this might take a number of forms. Maybe you openly reject Jesus, and so insist that God can be nothing like him. Maybe you are sympathetic to Jesus, but you simply doubt that what Jesus is like can tell us much about what God is like. Or maybe you like Jesus ... but you feel he needs to be improved on a bit. Whether it's his restrictive sexual ethic, his exclusive religious claims, his life-encompassing spiritual demands, or something else, there's a lot you like about Jesus, maybe, but some things about him that you *don't* want to be true of God, and so you insist on some level of distinction.

But such a division is not limited to non-Christians.

We see that right in our text. Philip is a disciple. He is a believer. He is a faithful follower of Jesus. And Jesus points that out in verse nine, noting that Philip has been with him for some time. [Carson, 494]

And yet ... Philip is making this division. Philip is dividing Jesus from the Father to such an extent that Jesus says that Philip doesn't even know Jesus as he should.

That doesn't mean that Philip isn't saved – but it does mean that despite his faith, there is a serious deficiency in his knowledge of Jesus and of the Father, because of the division he has placed between them.

And so even if you are truly a believer, you need to ask if you have fallen into the same error that Philip did. How have you placed a division between Jesus and the Father?

Maybe it's a subtle division. Maybe in all sorts of little ways you tend to think of Jesus' character, and heart, and disposition as something separate from the Father's.

Or maybe it comes out in more overt ways.

Maybe you think of the Father as the person of God concerned with justice ... and Jesus, the Son, as the person of God concerned with mercy. Maybe you think of the Father as the harsh God of the Old Testament and Jesus as the loving God of the New Testament. Maybe you think of the Father as the cold God who stays distant, and Jesus as the warm Son of God who draws near. Maybe it's a blend of all of those, or maybe it's something else altogether.

But what is it for you? Because we all do this to some extent. We are all like Philip in some way. And so Jesus's gentle rebuke for him is also a gentle rebuke for us.

Jesus's answer is to remind Philip, and to remind us, who he really is.

“Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?” he asks. “Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me.”

The language Jesus uses here of mutual indwelling is to emphasize the unity of Jesus with God the Father, within the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Of course Jesus, the Son, is a separate person from the Father. And yet, they are one on a deep and profound level, so that if we have known one, then we have also known the other.

For Jesus is the Son of God. As the Nicene Creed puts it, he is the “only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, light of light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father.”

That is who Jesus is, and so if we have seen Jesus, then we know – we, in some sense, have seen – God the Father.

That is what Jesus has to say to Philip here, and what he has to say to us as well.

The problem is the division. And the solution Jesus gives us is to look to Jesus in order to see and to know God the Father.

But if we are going to move beyond the superficial level, we need to take some time to consider what that really looks like in our own lives.

And to do this we'll need to ask two questions. First: In terms of the problem, once we've placed a division between Jesus and the Father, *what do we tend to do next* in our quest to know God the Father? And then second: What does it actually look like for us to turn to look to Jesus instead?

So first of all, once we've placed a division between Jesus and the Father *what do we tend to do next* in our quest to know God the Father?

And the answer is: We look elsewhere. We look to replacements. We look *somewhere else* to see and to know God.

And we tend to look to some aspect of human life. And that makes sense on some level, because human beings were made in the image of God.

But, of course, human beings are also fallen. Humanity has rebelled against God. And so, even though we are still made in God's image, we now present a twisted picture of God. Human life in this fallen and sinful world presents a misleading view – a false view – of what God the Father is really like. And yet, still – for both Christians and non-Christians alike – it is often this twisted and fallen human world that we look to to see and to know God, rather than looking to Jesus.

This pattern is not new – it is the basis of every non-Christian religion. It is the root of all idolatry – what lay behind every temple to Zeus or to Baal.

When we place a division between Jesus and God the Father, then the next thing we tend to do is to look *somewhere else* to see and to know God the Father.

That answers our third question, and brings us to our fourth.

Which is: What does it actually look like for us to turn to look to Jesus instead? What does *repentance* look like for us – to turn from these false pictures of God the Father, and to the revelation we receive in Jesus Christ?

And the answer will depend on what false view you tend to look to.

And the false views that we tend to struggle with the most are not the ones that are completely false ... but ones that begin with some aspect that *should* point to God ... but then twist it, and focus on the ways it is broken, and fails to image God.

It might help to begin with an example of something that obviously was meant to image God, but has been twisted in many people's lives.

When God made Adam and Eve, he called them to exercise dominion over all creation. Holding and exercising authority was to be one of the ways that they lived out the image of God – that they reflected what he is like.

That is true of all human authority, but it is especially true of the more intimate relationships of authority that we experience – like our parents. And maybe most especially with our fathers – after all, as we have been discussing, God identifies himself as our Heavenly Father, a sign that earthly fatherhood was especially designed and intended to reflect him in unique ways. And so fathers, and mothers, and human authorities in general are places we instinctually look to to see what God the Father is like.

But we live in a fallen world – a world in rebellion. And in a fallen world every human authority falls short of this ... and many act out an outright contradiction of this.

And some of you have experienced this in more severe ways than others.

Some of you have experienced fathers, or mothers, or worldly authorities who were characterized by abuse and self-centeredness.

For some of you, the form it took in that parent or authority was one of selfish anger. They responded to your failures and shortcomings not with firm discipline for your good, but with self-centered anger – with words or with actions meant not to help correct you but to satisfy their own wrath and their desire to inflict pain in one form or another. And maybe it was even clear to you that your shortcomings weren't the real source of their anger, but just an excuse to take their anger out on you. Either way, they used their power over you for *their* benefit, not for your good.

Or maybe their selfishness took the form not of anger, but of some form of exploitation. Maybe they used their power and authority over you to get something they wanted by threatening or manipulating you. That “something” they wanted could have been something subtle, like the reputation they thought you should bring to them or the affirmations they thought you owed them ... or it could have been something far more obviously insidious – some sinful desire they used you to fulfill.

And even though you would never intentionally use such a person as a guide to what God is like, as you – like all of us – fall short of looking to Jesus to see your Heavenly Father, it is all too common to unintentionally look to such authorities as a picture of what God is like.

And if you begin to see God like that sinful authority in your life, you might respond in a range of ways.

Maybe you declare that God is a selfish and self-serving tyrant, and you reject him outright. Maybe you reject him or anyone who claims to follow him as someone who is simply seeking power to use for themselves.

Or maybe for you it looks very different. Maybe it makes you not into a rebel, but into someone who carefully keeps all the rules God lays out for you, and who is concerned to do everything right ... but who doesn't actually like God or trust God very much at all. Maybe it shapes you into someone who doesn't “fear the Lord” in the way that the Bible speaks of it – since a Biblical fear of the Lord combines a healthy fear and reverence and awe of God's power and holiness with a trust in God's goodness and an assurance of his love and mercy.

No ... maybe instead it shapes you into a person who is scared about keeping every one of God's rules *not* because you love him and want to give thanks for his love for you, but because you are trying to *avoid his notice*. Maybe it turns you into someone who sees God not as One who is loving and whose attention you desire, but as One who is just looking for some slip-up, so that he has an excuse to let you have it. Maybe it leads you to want to avoid his attention at all costs.

Or maybe you don't see him so much as angry, as you see him as powerful and exploitative, and yourself as having no real choice but to comply. But you don't see him as loving. And you don't really love him.

Maybe you have experienced harsh or abusive parents or authorities, or maybe you haven't. But either way, does that sound like how you tend to view God – or how you are *tempted* to view God? And if so ... *whom* are you looking to to decide that that is what he is like?

Wherever it may be, Jesus calls you to turn your gaze from that thing – from that person – and to put your eyes instead on him. For in him you will truly see God the Father.

For what is Jesus like? He is the maker of heaven and earth, the Lord of all, the all-powerful king of the universe ... who comes in the form of a loving servant. He uses his power not to exploit his people, but for *their* good. He uses his strength to heal them, to draw them to himself, to defeat their sin, and their enemies, and even death itself on their behalf. He is willing even to die, so that they might be made whole. *That* is what Jesus is like. *That* is how Jesus uses his power. And that is therefore also what God the Father is like as well. He uses his power not to lash out when we make a mistake, not to vent his own frustrations on us, and not to exploit us for his own gain. He uses his power instead to love us, to forgive us, to heal us, to correct us, and to make us whole.

This is what we find in Jesus, and this is what we find throughout the Scriptures. *This* is how God has revealed himself to us.

Of course, for some of you, you have not experienced overt abuse or exploitation ... but maybe your view of God has been misshapen in some other way.

Maybe for you it was a father, a mother, or a worldly authority who was not hot with anger, but cold with indifference.

And now, if you're honest, you have decided that that is what God the Father is like as well. You view him as cold, as emotionally distant, as uninterested in you, or as only interested in you in an abstract and clinical way.

If that sounds like you, then once again, you need to turn your eyes from the replacement whom you have allowed to shape your image of God the Father, and look instead to the words and the deeds of Jesus.

For Jesus first tells us what God the Father is like – and it is not the image of one cold and detached, but of one warm and loving and engaged.

In Luke 15, Jesus gives us the picture of God as a loving Father, who, when his son abandons him, eagerly awaits his son's return – who looks down the road, and when he sees him, runs

through the gate, down the road, and embraces and kisses the child whom he loves. Jesus tells us how the Father is just like him: one who eagerly seeks to embrace and to love his wayward children.

Or maybe for you it was a parent or an authority or a series of institutions (whether schools, or jobs, or something else) that taught you that if you wanted those above you to care for you, you had to perform. You had to earn it. And if you fell short, you'd be viewed as worthless.

We live today in a meritocracy. You have to earn the respect of others and a place in society. And while all of us experience that in some institutions, some of us have experienced it more than others. Maybe that's not only what your job or your school felt like, but what your church often felt like, or what your family often felt like.

And so we assume that that is what God is like too: a Father who withholds his love from us until we earn it.

But again, if we look at Jesus, that is not what we see. In Jesus we see the Savior who died for his people *while they were still sinners*. In Jesus we see the Lord who came to die *for the ungodly*. In Jesus we see the Great Shepherd who came to seek the lost, and the Great Physician who came to heal the spiritually sick.

Others of you have experienced the opposite of a meritocracy. Others have experienced parents or institutions that made no demands of you at all, and only offered unquestioning support of whatever you wanted to do. Maybe that felt freeing to you. Or maybe it felt frightening. But either way, perhaps you have come to see God the Father in those ways. He is mainly there to support you in whatever *you* want to do. You are in charge, and he your cosmic personal assistant. He would never call out or question how you want to live or what goals you want to pursue with your life.

But then we look to Jesus. And if we take Jesus as he is presented in the Bible seriously, then we can never get that impression of him. For Jesus in the Scriptures comes not as a self-help guru, but as a king to a kingdom, calling people to join him in his royal mission. He gathers people in order to send them out to do *his* work. He heals people not so they can pursue *their* dreams but *his* purposes. And *that* is what God the Father is like as well. *He* will give us a purpose, not play a support role in our own private adventures.

And he will do that whether we or the world around us like it or not. After all, Jesus did not get crucified for being too agreeable. He was willing to say things that upset others. He was willing to make judgments when judgments were called for. That is what led to his crucifixion. And it is also a picture of what God the Father is like.

All of these examples are larger ways we may need to repent of our false views of God the Father that have been shaped by worldly replacements, and turn instead to look to Jesus. But there are other ways as well.

Perhaps you prefer the God of the philosophers – the God of abstract ideas and esoteric logical proofs. In that case, you should consider how Jesus, who shows us the Father, teaches again and again through stories, parables, riddles, symbolic signs, and personal fellowship with others.

Or maybe you prefer the God of the private spiritual realm, who comes to you just by yourself ... in which case you need to see how Jesus was constantly bringing people together in groups, creating relationships and meaningful communities around himself.

Or perhaps you tend to think of God as alien to this physical world we live in, in which case you need to look to the fact that Jesus embraced flesh, took it onto himself, and made his home here in the physical world.

We could go on. But what is it for you? Where have you adopted or embraced a picture of God the Father that doesn't look anything like Jesus Christ as he is presented to us in the Scriptures? In the end, it doesn't really matter where that false view came from. What matters, is what you will do once you see that it is a false view. Jesus here calls you to cast it aside. Jesus here calls you to turn from it and to look instead to him.

For whoever has truly seen him, *has* truly seen the Father.

Every one of us desires to know God the Father. For he has made us for himself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in him.

And yet, as we separate Jesus from the Father in our hearts and minds, we look to many false or twisted pictures in our attempt to "see" the Father.

But our Heavenly Father has not left us to seek him by ourselves. He has revealed himself to us. He has shown us what he is like. He has allowed us to see him, and to know him.

And he did it by sending his Son. He did it by sending Jesus.

Look to Jesus this morning. And looking at him, see what your Father is like and embrace him by faith.

Amen.

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**This sermon draws on material from:**

Augustine. *The Confessions*. Translated by J.G. Pilkington. From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 1. Edited by Philip Schaff. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887.) Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. (<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/110101.htm>). [This translation is the source of the quotation used in this sermon, but in general I would recommend the Boulding or Chadwick translations of *Confessions*.]

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