

A Sermon by N. Sellers, preached at North Church on 5-23-10 Pentecost

"Show Us!"

John 14:8-17, 25-27

You really can't blame Philip. In the midst of this long theological discussion about what's coming and where Jesus is going and what the disciples need to be doing about it, Philip makes the demand found at the beginning of this morning's lesson: "Show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." "Show me... and satisfy me." This demand with all its longing and frustration, finds its voice in so many different human circumstances:

Who can forget the scene in Jerry Maguire, when Cuba Gooding as a professional football player taunts his break-away agent Tom Cruise, "Show me the money!" "SHOW ME THE MONEY!" by which he means, "show me what you can do for me, and then maybe we can do business!" Show me.

There are echoes in the exasperated comments of Eliza Doolittle, as she finally faces down her exuberant yet timid suitor, Freddy: "Sing me no song! Read me no rhyme! Don't waste my time, Show me! Don't talk of June. Don't talk of fall! Don't talk at all! Show me!" Show me – actions speak louder than all your silly talk.

You might have even thought of the fast food ad campaign of some years ago, where the little blue haired lady pokes around at a hamburger bun, asking "Where's the beef!?! " Show me – prove it that you're actually worthy of being called a burger!

In another related sort of way, think of scientific inquiry, and the questions that are asked from the phenomena observed and the measurements made... It was Albert Einstein who said of himself, "It's not that I'm so smart, it's just that I stay with problems longer." (see www.brainyquote.com) Show me. Show me why.

And of course, there's the story of Moses seeking the face of God up on Mount Sinai as he received second copies of the tables of stone containing the ten commandments: "Show me your glory, I pray." God's reply is, "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, 'The Lord,'... but you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live..." (Ex. 33:18ff) Show me. Show me that you're for real!

As Jesus shares his parting thoughts with his inner circle, the writer of fourth gospel offers this account of Philip blurting out what nearly everyone has dreamed of asking for at some point - the chance to meet God face to face... With Philip's request, Jesus has the opportunity to offer one of the most detailed descriptions, not about seeing God, but about the intimacy of his relationship with God, the Father, and what this means for his followers. What Philip gets is a discourse about the relationship between the Son and the Heavenly Parent, and this leads to the promise of the Paraclete, the Comforter, Counselor and Advocate. Philip's request, that the disciples' search for God might be satiated with an actual appearance of the God, becomes the opportunity for John's late first-century community to gain profound understanding of how God in Jesus and Jesus in God are essentially one: "If you see me, you see God. If you believe in me, you believe in God, the One you want to see. And if you love me and obey me, the Spirit will come, to teach and remind you of all that I have said." (*my paraphrase.*)

Today is the day which the Western Christian Church has designated as a celebration of the blessing of the Holy Spirit's descent upon the earliest followers of Jesus. It's a day to be reminded about tongues of fire dancing and great verbal utterances exploding forth. It's the time to reconnect with the Spirit of truth as a full partner in the fellowship of God that we seem to neglect. Here in our texts are the first two of five passages found in John's gospel, which focus on the Spirit. In verses 16 and 17, and again in verse 26 of our chapter, Jesus underscores the role of the Spirit as continuing to sustain the presence of Jesus in the post-resurrection church, and as the teacher and witness who continues to form and shape Christian communities. (See NIB vol 9, *John*, Abingdon:1995, 774ff).

In one sense, what the Spirit does is not new, but rather a continuation of the work of Jesus, according to the gospel writer. To call the Paraclete, the "Spirit of truth," is to identify how closely the Spirit shares in the work of Jesus who has just been called "the truth" in verse 6 of our chapter. Part of the Spirit's work is to keep the truth of Jesus present in the world and with all believers after Jesus' departure. And as with the unity of God and Jesus in their mutual work, the relationship between Jesus and the Spirit is also defined by the unity of their work. (*Ibid.* p. 747) At least, this is the orthodox answer to such questions. Barbara Brown Taylor, writing about this, admits that she has never entirely understood any of these statements about how Jesus as God can be abiding in God but still be Jesus, or how to tell if it's Jesus or the Spirit, or the Spirit of Jesus who's doing the talking....

I accept them as earnest human efforts to describe something that cannot ever be described, which is the nature of God. We would probably be better off if we left that whole subject alone, but if you have ever lain on your back looking up at the summer night's sky full of stars than you know how hard that is to do. You lie there thinking unthinkable things such as what is out there, exactly, where it all stops, and what is beyond that. You lie there wondering who made it and why and where an infinitesimal speck of dust like yourself comes in. And after a while you either start making up some answers or else you go inside where it is safe and turn on the TV. (*Home By Another Way* Cowley, 1999:154)

Before we leave in search of our televisions, one of the clearest points Jesus makes in our text underscores the reality of the Spirit's presence and relationship with the community of faith. In the latter half of verse 17, Jesus states that knowledge of the Paraclete is defined by the Spirit's abiding with the believing community. It's the Spirit's particular assignment to ensure that the revelation of God in the incarnation of Jesus, now risen and alive, does not end with Jesus' death. (NIB, p. 748) In strong language, John helps us confirm that Jesus and God send the Paraclete to the community, not to individuals. The Spirit is not a private possession, nor is its presence to be found as an internal experience of the individual believer. We come to know the Spirit in the community into which it was given, the gathering of Christ's followers. This is not simply about a subjective experience of "God," but is always linked to the revelation of God made known in the person of Jesus. In this way, the Counselor Spirit is the unifying mark of Christian community because it gives all believers – all of us, you and I and every other disciple – access to Jesus, and to his love, forever.(pp. 776-777)

The other consistent depiction of the Spirit found in John – and especially here in verse 26 – is as teacher and witness: the Spirit "will remind you of all that I have said to you." On one level, the Spirit's role is about conserving the past work and words of Jesus, allowing churches like ours to reach back and remember, bringing Jesus' to life with new understandings in our current setting. When we need to "see Jesus," when we are at that place of asking God to "show us," it's the Spirit who makes possible fresh encounters with Christ's words possible in timely, bearable ways. (see 16:12-13).

But on another level, the Spirit also a creative force, enabling the word of Jesus to move forward in time, into the present life of a community; giving new meanings in the changing circumstances we find ourselves in. (*Ibid.*) "Show us... and we will be satisfied," is also an acknowledgement that we need to see and hear our Still-speaking God in the here and now...that as a community, Jesus' presence in and through the Spirit, will continue to be there when we need it.

I wonder what we might be asking of the Spirit here this morning, at North Church. [*Take a look at front of bulletins with people re vision statement*] What could the Spirit show us and satisfy us with? If the Spirit's focus on communities is to keep Jesus alive and present, how are we doing? What are we experiencing? *COMMENTS???*

Among the marks of a Christian community centered in the conserving and creative ways of the Spirit, is the presence of peace: "Peace I leave you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives." Unlike the fragility of the peace when it's to be found at all in our world today, the shalom of Jesus does away with our collective anxieties, inner turmoil and looming fears. That's not to say that we can now somehow keep ourselves from experiencing anxieties and the upheaval of desires and sorrows, but with the Spirit's help, we can avoid nurturing and entertaining these feelings (M. Shuster *Christ's Peace* sermon on 4-30-89 at Knox Church, Pasadena, CA). They do not have the final word in how we live life. Pentecost is the time to celebrate these great promises and to savor their possibilities in and through the Spirit. It's the time when our communal longing to be satisfied in the Spirit can be met in powerful ways. Come Holy Spirit, show us what we can still learn, and we will be satisfied. Amen.

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