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Show Us!

Romans 8:14-17

John 14:8-17, 25-27

On Pentecost we remember the story of how, after Jesus was crucified and resurrected, his disciples went back into Jerusalem to hide behind locked doors. And, as they were hiding, fearful that what happened to Jesus would also happen to them, God sent the presence of the Holy Spirit upon them and they were transformed from fearful, timid ex-followers of a dead Rabbi, into bold, decisive, powerful tellers and doers of the truth, who witnessed to the known world about the power, love and grace of God often at the cost of their own lives.

Today is the day when we remember that gift of power and presence that the Holy Spirit represents. But, it could be that some of us still find ourselves like Philip – questioning, bewildered, worried about the future and unsure.

I fully get Philip! When Philip pleads with Jesus, he is doing so because Jesus has just told his disciples that he will be betrayed, arrested and killed. They were depending on Jesus to lead them, and now he says he is leaving!? The forecast is stormy.

“Show us!” he says to Jesus. Tell us! We are often right there too. Where are you? My spouse just died! Where were you? I lost my job? Show me what to do now? I have to make a decision that is going to change my family’s whole life? Come down here and let me know that you are guiding me. I wasn’t expecting the Doctor to diagnose me with this! If you are really involved in the world, show us and we will be satisfied! “Show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” I’m with Philip.

And if we – the people who say that we love God and follow Jesus – are unsure and want reassurance – then maybe we should just stay here behind locked doors and wait for God to come and get us. Show us!

But, if we are with Philip, then we are also the target of Jesus’ scolding. “How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” says Jesus. “Have I been with you all this time, . . .and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”

Jesus is not speaking to the disciples who have just discovered that they are getting a stock dividend and have been cured of cancer and have won the lottery. Jesus scolds Philip – and all of us who stare at him in fear and uncertainty - right here when things look bad. From where we stand with Philip, it looks like the future is going to be very different from what we wanted, thought or worked for.

We have tried to follow Jesus. We have promised to love God and to serve God. We have given of ourselves to try to be faithful. And, often, we are right here with Philip when times get hard. We think we believe, but we need assurance, more faith, more certainty. Show us! Then, we will be satisfied, we say.

Jesus says essentially, “I have shown you.” “I am in the Father and the Father is in me.” And, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.” (Jn 14:15-17) “Peace I leave with you; . . . do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” (Jn 14:27)

In Romans, Paul says a very similar thing to all of the “Philips” in the world. Children of God are those who have been adopted and are now children of God. So, those who are Children of God are not slaves who live in fear. Children of God live in the assurance of their adoption. We are children – even heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. (Rom 8:15+)

Who are you? **I am a child of God.**

What does it mean to be a child of God? **That I belong to God who loves me.ⁱ**

So why are we so fearful? Show us and we will be satisfied!

How do we get to peace, assurance, conviction and love when the world around us is falling apart?

I believe that the answer to this question is very simple, although not easy. Jesus says, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” (Jn 14:15)

I believe that we only get to peace, assurance, conviction and love when we hold love and obedience very close together. Love and obedience. Love in this understanding is not a soft sentimental feeling. In God’s reality, Love, Grace and Compassion are always in close contact with righteousness, obedience and holiness.

When all hell breaks loose, when the bottom drops out, when what we prayed for, worked for and expected does not happen, when we are troubled and afraid, then it is ONLY love for God – whom we know in the person of Jesus Christ – and obedience to God’s commands that bring peace, assurance and conviction. We act in love, when every fiber in our being says to hate. We are to observe God’s law, when the culture says that to get ahead everyone cheats and lies.

When those first disciples unlocked the doors and stepped out into the Pentecost Crowd in Jerusalem and when Peter began to preach in Acts 2, he did not know how the story would end. Because we know how the story ends, we tend to overlook the giant leap of faith that those disciples took. In fact, we often forget the great sacrifices they gave. To unlock the doors, step out into the crowd and tell them the truth of who Jesus was actually did result in their death, torture and in being expelled from the synagogues in which they had learned to know and to love God. The only assurance that those first disciples had was Jesus' promise and the power of the Holy Spirit. And the promise was only known and the power of the Spirit only in evidence AFTER they stepped into the crowd and risked it all.

Don't mistake Jesus' assurance of peace for a promise that the world will cooperate and be nice. Those of us who love God, begin by obeying God. . . . then and only then, will we gain assurance, peace and a spirit of adoption rather than a spirit of fear. There really is no way around it. Like a child on the side of the pool who, afraid to jump, keeps insisting that the parent come closer, we insist on God showing us first, answering our prayers first, healing our disease first – before we will accept or acknowledge peace and assurance.

In C.S. Lewis' classic book, The Screwtape Letters, Lewis wrote a fictional series of letters that were written from a senior devil to his young nephew who was in the world trying to keep a human from loving and obeying God. It is a brilliant way to help us see what the life of discipleship is like. In the letters, the senior devil, Screwtape, writes to his nephew, Wormwood, regarding the danger of having a human being who is defeated, crushed and struggling still try to love and obey God this way.

“Be not deceived, Wormwood, our cause is never more in jeopardy than when a human, no longer desiring but still intending to do [God's] will, looks round upon a universe in which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys.”

Roman Catholic priest, Richard Rohr, writes “Love is always the final goal, but faith seems to be the way you get there. [Faith] is the only way to keep your mind, heart, and body open – when it wants to close down.”ⁱⁱ

Someone asked me, “Why are we sending people to Mexico this summer? It is so dangerous!” I think that the answer is that our mission partners there – Mark Adams and Miriam Maldonado Escobar and the good people working in *Frontera de Christo* are doing a better job of loving God and obeying God than we are, and there is evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit in what they are doing. We need to go and see. It may be that we will see enough to be brave enough to step out in faith back here in Columbia and to love and obey God until the power of the Holy Spirit flows through us as well.

It appears that love and obedience alone have the power to push us through the ego need for assurance that Philip here exhibits – that force field that separates us from God's full presence and from the peace and assurance that we say that we seek.

Philip – and all of us – say “Show us more, and then we will believe.” Jesus – says – No, first love me and obey my commandments, and then you will see. Love me, obey my commandments, then you will know power, peace and assurance – no matter what comes.

On this Pentecost Sunday, when we remember how boldly the Holy Spirit fell upon those first disciples. Instead of staying inside and whining that we need more evidence. The call of Christ is to love him and to keep his commandments. That requires us to go into the world and to live in love even if love is not returned, to extend mercy to the guilty, to share what we have even if we are afraid that we won't have enough, to tell the truth even when it makes us look bad, and to tell the world how we have come to know and to love God as we have found God in Christ, regardless of whether the world believes or not.

First we love, then we obey. Then, the Holy Spirit is given, so that we might take the Spirit with us into the world. Someone has to go first. Let it be us!

ⁱ Questions 1 & 2 from *Belonging To God: A First Catechism*, PC(USA).

ⁱⁱ Quoted in *Yes, And . . . Daily Meditations* by Richard Rohr, p. 349. Adapted from *The Good News According to Luke: Spiritual Reflections*, pp. 152, 178.