

First Presbyterian Church
John 14:1-14, “Showing God”
by Pastor Matt Johnson 5/14/2017

My friend Mike Gaffney tells the story of his daughter coming to him when she was four years old with a theological question.

“Where is God?” she asked.

“Well, that’s a good question,” he replied. “God is everywhere, God is all around us.”

“If God is everywhere, then why can’t we see him?”

The task was getting more difficult. Mike replied,
“Sweetie, God isn’t someone we can point at.
God is spirit. Just like the air, we can’t see God or touch God,
but we depend on God and we can’t live without God,
and God is very real.”

Now, Mike felt pretty good about this answer,
communicating some complex stuff at a level
that his daughter could connect with.
But his moment of pride was cut short when he looked back at his daughter
and she was visibly upset. Tears were forming in the corner of her eye.

“Hey – what’s wrong?”

“Well, you said we can’t see or touch God, but I want God with skin on!”

Isn’t that what we all want? God with skin on?

That’s what we want when we hurt, when we’re scared,
when we aren’t sure what’s going to happen,
when we don’t know what to do.

When our kids have a bad dream,
they don't just think of the idea of a parent who can comfort them,
they jump out of bed, run down the hall,
and come crashing into get a hug from a real-life parent.
(I said that as though they might want a hug from me,
but in reality mom is always the first choice,
which I feel compelled to point out because,
of course, it's Mother's Day.)

Deep down we all want some way to be tangibly connected
to divine presence that we can smell, touch, see, and hear.

When that doesn't get directly satisfied, we twist it slightly,
downgrading the requirements.
Then we enter into the worship of celebrities,
the worship of parents / role models,
the worship of sports figures,
or the worship of various bodily desires.

I don't mean we pray to these people or things,
but we look to them to satisfy that desire to have a connection
with something that is both divine
and tangibly present to our physical existence.

Jesus knows that we desire this connection.

He begins in John 14 with an address to the disciples.

The news had been pretty grim recently:
Peter's faithless denial had been predicted.
Jesus' own departure had been predicted.
And one of their own was on his way to betray Jesus to the authorities.

And so he says,
"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me."

Jesus highlights his own role in a major way here:

In the Greek, Jesus references himself 9 times in just two verses,
in the English we pair that down to 7 times for readability.

He asks them not to be too troubled because all of these things are happening
for a reason: That Jesus might go and prepare a place for them,
so that where he is they may also be!

So we can see that being present with Jesus is a major promise of heaven.

Jesus then assures the disciples that even though he's leaving,
they know the way to where he's going.

They know the way.

This assertion raises more questions than answers for the disciples,
and honest Thomas isn't afraid to speak his mind.

Jesus has been speaking to the disciples in figures of speech
for three years or more, but he still doesn't quite catch on.

“Pardon me, Mr. Jesus, sir, this is a really good sermon you're giving,
but, uh...if we don't even know *where* you're going
(and I certainly don't have a clue where your Father's estate is),
then how in your name could we know *the way* to get there?”

Because of the lovely, concrete, and fearless mind of Thomas,
Jesus has an opportunity to outline one of the most profound
self-definitions found in all of Scripture.

Thomas does not know the way, so Jesus tells him (in the words of Dale Bruner),

“I – I am the Way there, and I am the Truth that will lead you on the Way there,
and I am the Life that will give you the power
to follow the Truth along the Way there.’

“The East has perennially longed for ‘the Way’ (the *Tao*),
the West for ‘the Truth’ (*Veritas*),
and the whole world (east, west, north, and south)
for ‘the (real) Life.’ Jesus is, in person, all three.”

Last week we considered Jesus’ exclusive claim in John 10
as the only safe passageway for God’s sheep to travel through.

This exclusivity is heightened even more in this verse,
and in the line that follows it:

“No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Consider the implications if Jesus is really everything that he’s claiming to be
in John’s gospel. If this document tells us the truth,
then what should we do?

It would only make sense for us to place every fiber of our being
in utter reliance upon him.

If we were able to see the world through the lens that Jesus offers us here,
our priorities and interests would be placed in high relief:
our family, our livelihood, our national identity,
our political persuasions, our petty grievances,
our deeply justified grievances,
the totality of our property and wealth,
EVERYTHING would shrink in relation to the all surpassing importance
of being deeply, permanently, assuredly connected to Jesus Christ
with every facet of our lives.

But is it safe for us to commit so entirely? Isn’t this what is called,
“being an extremist?”

Isn’t it more reasonable to trust Jesus with some parts of our lives,
see how that goes, and then maybe commit more at a later time?

Is it even realistic that we could ever really, truly trust him
at the level of depth that these statements require?

CS Lewis tells a story in the Chronicles of Narnia that opens up
the full dynamics of Jesus’ claims in his book, “The Silver Chair.”

(Paraphrase in Dale Bruner, “The Gospel of John” p. 813.)

“In the story, Jill has entered a strange and magical country at the top of a very high mountain. After wandering for some time in search of water to drink, Jill encounters a Lion, who is lying between her and a deliciously babbling stream. Jill is terrified of the Lion, but she is also dreadfully thirsty.

“The Lion asks her if she is thirsty, and she replies that she is dying of thirst. ‘Then drink,’ the Lion tells her. She is too afraid to venture near the Lion and asks if he would mind leaving while she drinks. She quickly realizes the presumption of this request: ‘She might as well have asked the whole mountain to move aside for her convenience.’ Meanwhile, the sounds of the running water are making her more and more thirsty.

“Jill asks the Lion if he will promise not to do anything to her if she comes to the stream and drinks, but the Lion responds that he makes no promises. Driven nearly frantic with thirst, Jill comes a step nearer without noticing it. She then asks the Lion if he ever eats girls. The Lion responds matter-of-factly, ‘I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms.’

“When Jill tells the Lion that she does not dare to come up and drink, the Lion replies that she will then die of thirst. Jill comes another step nearer and says, ‘I suppose I must go and look for another stream, then.’ But the Lion replies, ‘There is no other stream.’”

Is it safe? Lewis would say, “No. It’s not safe. But it is necessary.”

I want to add that while it’s clear that Jesus is the only way to the Father,
we do not need to also say that Christianity is the only way to Jesus.

Bruner suggests that the claims of Jesus create a vertical beam of exclusivity
as the only way to God. But then we must also nail to that vertical beam
the horizontal beam of Christ’s inclusivity
which reaches around the world.

God is not limited in his saving power by our religious codes and doctrines,
and we have every reason to believe that the life Christ is breaking into
the world in the most surprising of places.

We turn now to verses 7-11.

Jesus continues the audacious statement parade, declaring,
**“If you have come to know me, you will come to know my Father as well.
In fact, from now on you do know him; you have even seen him.”**

This is a bit much to take in. Sensing the depth of the waters,
Philip takes over for Thomas, and makes a straightforward,
and yet astonishing request.

Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”

Lord, show us the Father. Show God to us, Jesus.
Let us see the eternal being that upholds all of reality.
Give us an opportunity to behold the great I Am.

How do you show God to someone?
What kind of a response or an experience could Philip have possibly
have expected? To be transported into the heavenly realm?

Jesus responds with pity, love and grace, **“Don’t you know me, Philip,
even after I have been among you such a long time?
Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.”**

No transportation to another dimension was necessary,
because the request of Philip had already been granted years ago.

Jesus is God the Father with skin on.
If you want to know what God is like, how God would respond,
whether God is interested or cares,
then look at Jesus.

If we have seen him, we've seen the Father.

If we've heard his voice, we've heard the voice of the Father.

If we have experienced any miracles,
or received any gifts through him,
we've experienced the power of God the Father.

There is, then, no difference between the God of the Old Testament
and the God of the New. There is no God of Judgement
pitted against a God of Grace.

There is only the one God, existing eternally in Three Persons,
who we see with skin on in Jesus of Nazareth.

And yes, I believe that if we have read about him and asked the Holy Spirit
to use the text of Scripture to help us see Jesus, to hear his words,
to experience his signs and wonders,
then this promise is extended to us.

And yes, I believe that Jesus continues to speak and act through the Spirit
in our own time and place today.

The passage closes with a double Amen statement:

**“Very truly I tell you, all who have faith in me
will do the works I have been doing,
and they will do even greater things than these,
because I am going to the Father.
And I will do whatever you ask in my name,
so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.
You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.”**

Not only does Jesus invite us to place immense faith in his personal
representation of God in the flesh,
he also invites us to share in the works he is doing,
and to ask him for whatever we need.

In other words, Jesus is saying, “Call me on it.”

If you want God with skin on,
then take up the works that God began on earth in Jesus.
Be a friend to the friendless.
Be a comfort to the uncomforted.
Point out hope to the hopeless.
Lay down your own cares and concerns to lift up the cares and concerns of others.
Love the unlovely.

Will we do greater things than Jesus? Well, not greater in kind.
But when you consider the lives lived in Jesus' name across the world
and throughout time, the church has certainly done more
in number than Jesus did.

Don't do these things because they alone will change the world,
but do them because they point toward
the reality of the world that is to come.

And as you take up this Jesus way of living out the truth,
ask him for what you need.
Press God in the name of Jesus and see if there is anything
he won't provide.