

Sunday Dec. 27, 2020
Lesson 4: The Father Dwells in Jesus
Scripture: John 14: 8-14

Context:

Our series continues to focus on God's hope for humanity. For the season of Advent and Christmastide, we have been looking at "God with Us," in scripture. Our final lesson in this section concludes with John 14: 8-14. Our purpose today is to explore how following Jesus gives us a path to encounter God and receive eternal life.

Last week, we started looking at the gospel of John and the themes of light and darkness found in the text. We discussed John the Baptist and how God in the flesh brought light to the world and gives hope to those who believe in Jesus. Since John does not include a nativity story, we dive right into the ministry of Jesus. Today, we explore one of his conversations with his disciple Philip.

In this conversation with Philip, Jesus reminds his disciples of the intimate ties to the Father. Philip, like the other disciples and followers of Jesus, tells him if Jesus shows them the Father they will be satisfied in knowing his identity as the Son of God. They are the visual learners, those who need something to look at in order to believe.

However, Jesus reveals to Philip, and the other disciples, of how what they need is sitting right there in front of them. For his entire ministry, Jesus has shown them the work of the Father in his behavior and words. Even as he leaves them to ascend to the Father, they have the example of the words and works of Jesus. God will be glorified as they respond to God's call and follow the example of Jesus in their own lives.

The gospel writer is not just providing the words of Jesus in this passage. The gospel writer is also giving the believers of Jesus two ways to go and understand what Jesus has come to do. They can either accept his word about the intimate Father-Son relationship or be moved by the testimony of Jesus's works.¹ While the latter would attract the masses, Jesus makes clear to his disciples of how the first is more powerful. Miracles and signs can be done to make believers out of people; yet God in the flesh is even more powerful. God in the flesh may be harder to believe and yet a tangible expression of God's love for humanity.

This story is also powerful in comparison to another story of God showing up to humanity. Philip's question is similar to Moses's desire to see the face of God in Exodus 33:19-20; yet God tells Moses of how no one will see God's face and live.² There is a shift. Jesus is in God and as God the Father dwells in him as part of the Triune God, we see God giving us new ways of experiencing the divine.³ God is so moved by humanity, God wants us to know God in the flesh.

¹ Sloyan, Gerard. "John," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2009), 180.

² Ibid., 180.

³ Ibid., 180.

Application

How appropriate our last lesson of the themed lessons on “God with Us” comes two days after Christmas. For those who are quick movers, the Christmas trees may have disappeared and the nativities stored away. For others celebrating the season of Christmas, we look at our nativities and trees wondering how the awe of the season could have come and gone so quickly. The good news for us as followers of Jesus is that the season is just beginning. For now we celebrate the incarnation and how God has come in the flesh with us to dwell.

This passage reminds us of how when Jesus came to the earth, there were still many questions about his identity and how God could be flesh and still be divine. There are times we may even still ponder it today, even those who are seasoned in the faith. Yet Jesus gives us today the gift of faith and reminds us of how he is God. As God dwells in him and Jesus in us, we are given hope in this life and the life to come.

I often think we can empathize with Philip in this passage. For those who are visual learners, to see is to believe. One thinks about the children’s movie, “The Polar Express,” where the challenge of the young protagonist is to see Santa and to know he is real. He wants to believe; he searches his heart and his experience on the Polar Express to come and know Santa is indeed real.

The movie is not just a child’s movie as I am also reminded of how at times we too struggle to believe and God has a way of sneaking up and reminding us that our belief is enough. The same goes for Jesus and the relationship to the Father. As the disciples see Jesus, hear his words, and watch his actions, they are transformed as they receive a glimpse of the divine.

The good news in this passage isn’t just about the identity of Jesus as the Son of God and the face of the Father in the flesh. The good news is how the disciples will do even greater things than Jesus. They will do greater things not because of their own endeavors or of somehow achieving their own divinity; but because God will be glorified in them as they mimic and strive to be like our Lord. Even when they mess up, God will take them and refine them.

The passage gives us hope as we reflect on how we are to lead our lives. Many of us might strive to do the right, ethical thing and from time to time, we fail. Either intentionally or unintentionally, we fall on our face and we mess up. We can always strive, and hopefully more often than not, we glorify God in our decisions and relationships.

The words of Jesus in the gospel of John remind believers there is hope. Perhaps the greatest gift we have of Jesus is how he stayed with the disciples through thick and thin. Even when things were hard or their questions were dumb, Jesus was with them. At times he was gentle and loving with them, and at other times he was firm and reproachful. Through it all, Jesus taught them about the compassion and mercy of God and the path before them. What they needed was in front of them. God would be glorified as they heeded instructions and believed God was indeed with them.

The same goes for us. Jesus is with us through thick and thin. In our stubbornness and willfulness, he loves us. His words still speak to us today and his example gives us a way by which we are called to emulate as we serve others by following him. We have a path in front of us; Jesus is reminding us we have indeed seen the glory of the Lord.

Why do you think “seeing is believing” is such a powerful sentiment today? What does it mean for “God in the flesh” to still be present with us today? What qualities of our Lord do you strive to possess? What does the gift of faith mean to you? How can your deeds and words glorify God?

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