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Alexandria, VA 22310  
May 23, 2010: Pentecost

John 14:8–17, 25–27

## REPLACING FEARS MEDDLING

Simply put, people want to see God. People don't necessarily need to understand God, if they can just see God, especially in us.

Philip was a little confused. He had actually seen God and didn't recognize him. He had been in the presence of the holy—the most holy—and was unaware. How could Philip have missed it? How could Philip not understand that Jesus was there with them at table, and the talk Jesus is sharing—the conversation he is engaging them in—is meant to be their reference point for everything that comes later. Jesus knows they haven't understood much of what he has taught them. So now he gives them a condensed version. How could they not get it?

All of Philip's life, he had been taught by Old Testament stories that no one can see God and survive. Remember how even Moses, when he goes up on the mountain and is able to see God from behind, still comes down with a sunburn, for he has been in the presence of a mighty power—the mightiest power that has ever been.

Remember that scene from *Raiders of the Lost Ark* when they are about to open the Holy Grail and the light comes out, and everyone who looks at that light is instantly vaporized. That's the feeling Philip has about seeing God. That's his inherent disposition toward what it would mean to be in God's presence. It's simply impossible to co-exist in the presence of such a great power, and so he says, "Show us the father and we will be satisfied."

Before we're too harsh on Philip, or for that matter on Thomas before him, who has asked Jesus where he's going, why can't they go with him, how do you get there from here? Before we're too judgmental, maybe Philip is trying to help Thomas with his question. He, too, wants to inquire about the holy. Where is heaven? Show us the way. And Philip echoes that deep longing we all have. The question we want to ask, but are afraid to ask: How can we be sure when we are being led by the Holy Spirit? How can we be sure that what we want is what God wants for our lives or for our children or for our world?

The question is as relevant for us as it was when Philip asked it. And we'd do well to see ourselves—our walk of faith, our experience as brothers and sisters in Christ—as the church alive today. We'd do well to see ourselves in this exchange. Here's what I mean. Philip and Thomas before him have made their experience of faith too much about themselves instead of about Jesus. We are just as likely to do the very same thing.

We make our experiences in the church, all too often, too much about us. Did we receive proper recognition? Does it matter that we've expressed our opinion? Has anyone

heard us? We're so concerned with our identity that we forget a greater identity—the personification of Jesus Christ for this world.

I think sometimes you're tempted to take what happens here for granted, but being a little newer on the scene, I'm still amazed. I'm amazed when you can take a hymnal and sing a hymn you've never seen before and recognize its significance. And you sing it with all that you have. I'm amazed when we put those barrels for Koinonia in the narthex or the boxes for Miriam's Kitchen in the coat closet, the food and supplies go in. I think more than making a statement about "who we are," those barrels make a statement about "who God is and what matters to God." And it matters when people have less than what they need, and God calls us to identify those with Christ's response. Yes, I know, we stumble over verse 12: "You'll do even greater things than I have done." When you think about it, Jesus fed the multitude; and how many multitudes has the Bush Hill Church congregation fed through its generosity, through its hours of service?

When I hear about you taking time to actually be a part of a small group where you get to know one another (and some have criticized us that there aren't enough small groups in existence at Bush Hill Church), I look at how we associate, and there are really quite a few. There's a place to plug in, a place where that identity that we long for oh so deeply can have expression. There's a place where we can actually get to know a teenager. How desperately teenagers would like for us to know them.

Why is it so difficult for us to see these things as other than God calling us? I'm convinced when we take the time to be interested in one another, we are demonstrating God's concern for that person through our attentiveness. I'm convinced when we talk to each other about our need to be involved in this neighborhood of ours—our longing to be even more of a mission church, to give more to mission, to do and be more in mission efforts, even when we are talking about a new building to replace one that no longer works—we're talking about Jesus more than we are about ourselves, about what Jesus wants, not what we want. You name anything that we are involved in—social issues, Bush Hill Day School, the way we believe we should take our faith to work with us on Monday, the mission school in Liberia, our work for justice, our work for freedom, our work to alleviate hunger—we're making a statement about who God is, not just who we are.

Now we're good Presbyterians, and we're all too timid to admit it openly, but the fact is we are becoming Christ and continuing his work in our world. But when was the last time we actually admitted verbally, or at least to ourselves, that what we are doing we are doing for Jesus?

People want to see God, pure and simple. And when people see God, eventually they know it. And that's the big difference, isn't it?—the difference between presenting Jesus to one another and making it about ourselves, the difference that happens when we stop trying to fix other people and help ourselves first. The difference becomes as we commit our words and actions, our conversations and our relationships to Jesus, then we try to help others. We can't resist. We can't do other. And, that fixing people—we reserve that for the Holy Spirit to do in us, for us.

When we have committed our problems, our challenges, even the unknown to Jesus, our instincts are transformed. We are more likely to respond with compassion, with curiosity and concern. Yes, we're still the same person we always were. The temptation to be judgmental or angry still raises its ugly head. But Jesus overcomes that and the more we surrender, the more completely he replaces our old nature with his spirit.

Jesus makes this all very simple for the disciples. And he does the same for us. It's kind of like he's at the dinner table with them writing instructions on "Faith for Dummies": If you see me, you have seen God. Get it? If you do what I do, I have been doing this through you. And you will see me again, even after I'm gone. And when you don't think you can do what I've been asking, I promise to send you my counterpart—a friend to stand beside you to teach you, to remind you what I've said today, to show you how to be like me, to be Jesus to one another. So which will it be?

Will we continue that futile attempt to fix others? Or will we see the Holy Spirit allowing God to fix us? Will we help ourselves? Or, through our helping others, will we discover that we have all that we need? It really does make all the difference. A new building for Bush Hill or a new building for Jesus? A new building for Jesus is full of hope and certainty. What does it mean, really, to become the living, breathing body of Christ.?

I think the first thing it means is that we recognize that fear meddles with our plans, with our community; but there is something more powerful than fear. Jesus says it is the peace that he's sending—the peace that promises that everything is, in fact, changing.

In his book, *When God Whispers Your Name*, Max Lucado says that no one can look at the face of God without fear; yet, Jesus is the face we can approach with joy and expectation!

Friends, may it always be that we strive long, work to discipline ourselves, and release ourselves to be Jesus to one another. He is, in fact, everything we need.

So may we see our communion with one another. Amen.