

## In the image of God

11 5 14

Almighty God,  
whose son Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life:  
raise us, who trust in him,  
from the death of sin to the life of righteousness,  
that we may seek those things which are above,  
where he reigns with you  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

Today's text is from next week's gospel portion, John chapter 14 and verse 7, the moment when Philip asks Jesus something which, to Jewish ears, would have been quite shocking:

**'Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.'**

A couple of week's ago, I confessed a sneaking regard for Thomas – for his honesty, his honest doubt, his honest questions. And today, let me say I also admire Philip, Bartholomew's friend. According to John's Gospel, Philip was the fourth disciple to follow Jesus, the first Jesus actually calls to follow him and Philip, with enthusiasm, goes off to find his friend, Nathaniel Bartholomew, and to share with him the fact that he's found the Messiah and to bring him to meet Jesus for himself.

But today's text is from the last night of freedom before Jesus is arrested. The mood here is sombre and sober as Jesus tells the Twelve he must leave them. Thomas is uncertain of the way ahead and Jesus tells them that He himself is 'the way, and the truth and the life' and that 'No one comes to the Father except through me' which gives Philip the chance to ask his question which is our text today:

'Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.'

So why to a Jew would the text be so shocking? Simply that no mortal man has ever seen the face of God – impossible. God is transcendent, totally apart from this temporal, material universe of his creation. Moses and Elijah may have felt his presence – in Moses' case, his back as he passes by; in Elijah's case, in a profound silence – but never face-to-face. According to Isaiah, even the seraphim flying before the throne of God, out of respect covered their faces with one of their three pairs of wings. So, in his desire to transcend the temporal and be connected to the eternal, Philip asks Jesus to show them the Father whom Jesus says he is in truth the way to find.

Jesus' reply is a challenge. Open your eyes. Wake up. Don't you see that if you see me then you are seeing him too? See the Son and you see the Father. What Jesus is claiming is a truth that we as Christians accept – that Jesus is the Son of God, that Jesus is God incarnate, the Word made flesh. In the story of Genesis, Man is said to be made in the image of God, Imago Dei. In Jesus, through the Incarnation, God is embodied.

So how does Jesus help Philip to see God by looking at Jesus himself ? Two things: by what he says and by what he does. The words Jesus speaks, his teaching, is inspired by God and is the word of God, articulated by the Word of God. So in what Jesus says we have a record of what the Father is saying through the Son and just as Jesus taught Philip and Thomas and Bartholomew, so too he can speak to us today. The deeds that Jesus does, miracles of healing and power over nature, the compassion he shows to the sinful and marginalised speaks volumes about who Jesus is. When John the Baptist asked from prison whether Jesus was indeed the Messiah, Jesus simply pointed John's disciples to the fact of what he was doing: the blind see; the deaf hear, the lame walk; lepers are cleansed; the dead are raised and good news is preached to the poor (Matthew 11 v 4 & 5) – i.e. Isaiah's prophecy concerning the Messiah is being fulfilled.

And that is the honest truth: if we want to see God, then what we must do is look at Jesus. It is no coincidence that in our stained glass windows here in St Bart's are pictures of the life of Christ which help us imaginatively to picture the Father. Behind the font, Jesus the Good Shepherd and Jesus Light of the World. Above the altar, four scenes from Holy Week, not least the naked Christ suffering on the cross and above the children's corner, pictures of the Resurrection and his Ascension. And the picture I have of God made real to me by Jesus is neatly summed up in the theme of last week's sermon – God is love.

May that be true for you and me.

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

*Preached at the Eucharist*

*St Bartholomew's, Dinard*

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G: Sermons 29 : Imago Dei

