

Sermon preached by John H. Houdeshel  
in the First Presbyterian Church , Lancaster  
Sunday, September 6, 2009

Text - John 14:8 - 14

It was on June 7<sup>th</sup> that this current series of sermons was begun under the theme "Words of Jesus in Intimate Conversation." Thus far there have been thirteen Sundays when passages of Scripture appropriate to that theme have been presented for our meditation. We come now to the fourteenth and I am grateful for the opportunity to be what is called in relay races, the "anchor man." The individual to whom Jesus spoke these words in a personal way was Philip - one of the twelve disciples.

In making preparation for this sermon, I have come to the realization that it is what I call a "Mirror Sermon." By that designation I mean to make it very clear that this is a matter which I know that I need to think about very seriously in my own endeavor to live a life which is consistent with my Christian faith. In other words, this is a message which I really need. But, in a whimsical way, I begin with a Nursery Rhyme:

"Pussy cat, pussy cat, Where have you been?" "I've been to London to visit the Queen."

"Pussy cat, pussy cat, What did you there?" "I frightened a little mouse under her chair."

The point of the rhyme, as I understand it, is to raise an objection to the "pussy cat." What? You were in London and managed to visit the Queen - and in the midst of all of that wondrous pomp and circumstance - all of the dignified and important people in their splendid attire, the Queen herself in her royal gown and crown, the furniture and furnishings - in the midst of all of that, all you did was frighten a mouse under her chair? But then, that would be the appropriate behavior for a cat. But what of us and our reactions to our surroundings and the people with whom we are living and working?

It seems to me, that is the point of Jesus' question to Philip. When he made his request, "Lord, show us the Father and we shall be satisfied;" Jesus in turn asked, "Have I been with you all this time,

Philip, and you still do not know Me? Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father?" The implication seems to be that in spite of all that Philip has seen Jesus do and heard Him say, His works and His words, he had apparently missed the main point - namely that Jesus was indeed God Incarnate \_ God in human form. And thus I say to myself, as I say to you, "Don't miss it."

There is the temptation, of course, for us to say, "Well, but we are having to take all of this information \_second-hand\_. It would be different if we had been there to see with our own eyes the mighty works of Jesus and hear with our own ears His marvelous words." It is a considerable handicap, and that is precisely why we have to spend time in serious study and contemplation of this record which we have. When we think of Jesus, the Son of the Father, is there a consistency with that Father? Can we say, as we often say of human sons of human fathers, does this Son "take after" His Father? Those are interesting words: "take after." I assume by them that we mean to inquire if there is an apparent agreement in word and deed in the actions and words of the Son with those of the Father. To apply that to our present text, "Were the words and deeds of Jesus such that we could say that He "took after" the divine Father?"

For a brief examination of this, I would suggest going back to the basic demands which God, the Father, has made of all of His people, which can be reduced to His command in Deuteronomy 6:5, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might," and also in Leviticus 19:18, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." I don't know that anyone would say of Jesus that He did not follow those commands as no other person who has ever walked this earth. In that sense, He surely did "take after" His Father. And apparently that's what Philip missed - which is a warning to us - lest we miss it too.

From what we know of Philip from the Gospel records, on the basis of my study of them, I would suggest that there were three times when he specifically was privileged to be the recipient of a personal word from Jesus, thus following the theme of this series: "Words of Jesus in intimate conversation."

In the Gospel which John wrote, he tells us that Philip came from Bethsaida, the same city as Peter and Andrew. Almost immediately after Jesus called them to follow Him, He also found Philip and gave the same invitation to him - "Follow Me." That was an exceedingly brief conversation, but obviously was very moving. When Jesus spoke just those two words, "Follow Me," Philip did, and then what? In the high emotion of that encounter, he went immediately and found his friend, Nathaniel, and fairly exploded with the words, "We have found Him - the One about Whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus, Son of Joseph from Nazareth." Nathaniel, in effect, dashed cold water on Philip's excitement with the words, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Philip was not about to argue that point, but said simply, "Come and see." Nathaniel did, and thus heard Jesus' startling words to himself, "Behold an Israelite indeed in whom there is no deceit." When Nathaniel asked Jesus how could He say such a thing of him, having just met him, Jesus replied that He had seen him under the fig tree before Philip called him, and went on to say that he would see even more wondrous things than that - even "the heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

Thus, at the outset, we see Philip as an evangelist. Having been called by Jesus to follow Him, right away he was eager to share this evangel - this "good news" with his friend, Nathaniel. When Nathaniel raised the question about whether any good thing could come out of Nazareth, he refused to argue that statement of provincial jealousy. Instead, he issued the stark and direct invitation, "Come and see." When Nathaniel did just that, he, too, was convinced that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah, and indeed made His confession, " Rabbi, You are the Son of God, You are the King of Israel!" (John 1:43 - 51).

The next specific record of a conversation between Jesus and Philip is in the Gospel of John at the sixth chapter where we have the account of Jesus\_ feeding a crowd of 5,000 men (not counting women and children) with a young boy's lunch of five loaves and two fish. At that time, Jesus posed the question to Philip: "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" Then John inserts these words: "Jesus said this to test him, for He Himself knew what He was going to do" I ask myself, "How would I have liked to take a test under those circumstances? Is it really possible for me, a mere mortal, to suggest any kind of a reasonable answer to that question?" But Philip took a stab at it and after assessing the size of the crowd and the going rate for box lunches came up with his answer. "Six months\_ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." I am grateful that Philip framed his answer in such a way. If he had given his reply in the coin of the day, saying something like "It would take so many denarii;" we would have a dreadful time trying to figure out just how much that would be. We don't really know what a denarius was worth, and would have to make all manner of calculations, allowing for the rate of exchange and inflation. But six months\_ wages is something to which we can relate. That was his answer. So did he pass the test? From the action of Jesus, probably not. What would have been the right answer? Perhaps Andrew had something close to it when he said, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish - but what are they among so many?"

So then Jesus did exactly what He had planned to do before He asked the question of Philip. We don't have any record of Philip's reaction to this miracle. John wrote that "When the people saw the sign that Jesus had done, they began to say, "This is indeed the prophet Who is to come into the world." This was followed by an even more zealous movement, for John continues His account, "When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He withdrew again to the mountain by Himself." Philip and the other disciples got into their boat and headed back across the Lake, but then a fierce storm came up and they had a rough time trying to row and make any headway. Looking through the storm, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. But He said, \_Do not be afraid." And when He got into the boat, they realized that they were at their destination. Thus Philip and the other disciples realized that here was One Who did actually have the authority and power to control the forces of nature. It is something which we too need to

remember in those circumstances when we feel that we are about to be overwhelmed with the stormy events of this life. That is why I chose the hymn which preceded this meditation, for it is an affirmation of our faith in Jesus. The hymn writer, Katharina von Schegel with her verse paraphrase of Psalm 46 has given us the spirit-enforcing words, "Be Still My Soul \_ the waves and winds still know His voice Who ruled them while He dwelt below."

The third record is our text for the day. When Philip asked Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father and we will be satisfied," Jesus replied, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know Me?" Then Jesus continued with words that are a challenge to our thinking: "Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father?" Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own; but the Father Who dwells in Me does His works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me\_ but if you do not, then believe Me because of the works themselves."

So there it is - the main point, which you and I must not miss. Jesus is God in human flesh. This is our Trinitarian Christian affirmation - that there is One God, Who has revealed Himself in Three Persons - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and each of these Persons is God. So, like another disciple, Thomas, who, when He saw Jesus in His Resurrected Body, still with the print of the nails in His hands and the spear-wound in His side, so we too must address Jesus as "My Lord ... and my God!" Amen.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, it is an overwhelming thought to us that You came into this world in the same manner as we did - by being born of a woman. As we have read and meditated in these past fourteen weeks upon Your words in intimate conversations with a variety of people, now culminating in Your words to Your disciple, Philip, help us to grasp and hold fast to this great truth - that You are indeed One with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen.