

# The Day of Pentecost

## HOLY TOPSY TURVY

John 14:8-17 (25-27)

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## Analysis by Jerome Burce

8 Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." 9 Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you [singular] still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you [sg.] say, 'Show us the Father'? 10 Do you [sg.] 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. 11 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. 12 Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. 13 I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

15 "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. 17 This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

[25 "I have said these things to you while I am still with you. 26 But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. 27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I

give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.]

*Notes on the text—*

- *Except where noted above, all instances of “you” are in the plural.*
- *“Advocate” (vv. 15, 26) is one of many limping alternatives to “Paraclete,” the latter a transliteration of the Greek noun that occurs at this point. That noun is stuffed with more nuance than any common English word can handle. Its partnering verb, “parakalein,” shows up in 2 Cor. 5:20, where God is “making his appeal” through Paul and company, who implore readers on behalf of Christ to be reconciled to God.*

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## **DIAGNOSIS: More Is Less**

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) :** *Razzle Me, Dazzle Me*

Philip (v. 8) doesn't get it. Thinks he, there has got to be more to God than I'm getting in this present group hug with our main man Jesus. I've thought this too. So have—so do— the Phils and Philippas who sprinkle the pews of today's usual half-empty church. “Show us more,” they say. “More God than we're getting from the preacher's endless Jesus-talk or that weekly bread-and-wine business, neither of which coughs up anything of substance that we can brag to our neighbors about.” Hence the pressure on preachers to promise more: more God, more miracles, more life-changing messages or perhaps more “realistic” ones—sure, a

passing nod to Jesus, now shunted to a corner, but then it's on to the Real Deal. Let's call it: "Your Every Prayer Answered: Seven Steps to Unlocking the Power of John 14:14." Or maybe "Peace in Our Time: Why Your Darfur Letter Matters." Serve this up with a little flair (says Phil the Church Guru) and watch how sprinkled pews will be packed instead. Could be he's right.

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) :** *"...Like a Fatherless Child"*

Guru Phil, after all, has his finger on Philippa's anxiety, or as Jesus puts it, her troubled heart (v. 27b). Why troubled? Because she's desperate to say that she "has seen the Father" (v. 9) and is pretty sure she can't. She can't, that is, point to substantive evidence that The Gracious Parent is doing "his works" (v. 10) on her behalf, within the context of her daily experience. That experience includes, say, the chronic illness; the heap of debt; the rebel child who's flunking out of school. If she thinks beyond her navel, it includes also the broader ills of our mangled world, Legion is their name. So where's that dose of "fatherly and divine goodness and mercy"—so she learned from her catechism to call it— that such things scream for? She doesn't see it. At church she gets words, words, and more words. Sorry, they don't help. They don't make things better. Some days they make things worse; as on this day, with its "I'll do anything you ask" line (vv. 13-14, the "you" heard—with Americans, how else?—as a singular you). "Yea, right!" mutters P. Does she believe that "the Father is in [Jesus]" and vice versa (v. 10)? Not a chance. Not if by "Father" we mean the One whose "works" entail stuff done for her that matters to her today. For that she wants more. More, that is, than Jesus delivers.

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) :** *A Long Way from Home*

But where is this Father, if not in Jesus? Nowhere, of course.

Deep down Philip knows this. So does Philippa, Step 2 above. So do we all, that shared demand—"show us the Father" (v. 8)—giving all of us away as disciples who don't believe they've "seen him" (v. 9) and don't know where to look now that Jesus and his "words" (v. 10b) have left them less than "satisfied" (v. 8). Lo, the irony: our yen for more-Father-than-in-Jesus has stuck us with less-Father-than-in-Jesus. Still lots of God out there, to be sure, but by no means a fatherly God, or motherly for that matter. All that's left is God the Distant, the Opaque, the Probably Unconcerned; the God with whom to wheedle, beg, negotiate; the God somehow to impress, attract, cajole, coerce; the God we've got to satisfy or, failing that, ignore. Fat chance. Here's how Jesus speaking earlier has put it: "The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge." A "last day" too (12:48). Judge? That's God the Judge. It's sure not "the Father." Again, deep down we Philips know this. No wonder we're "afraid" (v. 27b). We ought to be.

## **PROGNOSIS: Less Is More**

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) :** *When Jesus Headed Home*

The lead-in to the interchange between Philip and Jesus has been Jesus' announcement that he is going to "my Father's house" to "prepare a place for you" (14:2). A few hours later the trip will begin with his arrest, trial and crucifixion (chapters 18 and 19). As he hangs dying that following afternoon Philip is nowhere to be seen. Ditto for the other disciples save the one "whom he loved" (19:26), though that designation misleads if it prompts the thought that the rest of them are not still loved. Indeed they are, "to the end," and however lost "in the world" they might happen at the moment to be (13:1b). After all, the One hanging there is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (1:29). That includes the sin of Philip's unbelief. Taken away, that sin is no longer there for God to judge. Jesus

demonstrates this himself when he appears to Philip and the rest of them on Easter night. "Peace be with you," he says (20:19). A week later when he repeats himself (20:26) at least one of them, Thomas, finally tumbles to what he's seeing. "My Lord and my God" (20:28). In other words, in seeing Jesus he has seen the Father (v. 9). At last! But does the vision hold? Seems not. Soon Thomas too has gone fishing as if Easter hadn't happened and "the words that I say to you" (v. 10) had been forgotten (21:2-3). What does Jesus do? Yet again he comes, and he comes as Paraclete, appealing to this sorry bunch to be reconciled through him to God (see above, Text Note 2). "Follow me," he says (21:19). "Feed my sheep" (21:17). Notice this astounding patience—Jesus' patience, yes; the Father's too. That's what we get when our sin is taken away. Is this enough to satisfy Philip and his ilk? Put it this way: what more could we want?

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) :** *"...Like a Spirited Child"*

Yet more is the very thing we keep getting. Not any old more, but—get this—more God. More God than we were looking for, that is. Behold the Father's gift, hinged on Jesus' behest, of "another Paraclete" (v. 16), the One who does for all disciples as Paraclete Jesus did for the few. He teaches us "everything," those things above all we keep struggling to grasp; he keeps reminding us of "all that I have said to you" (v. 26), beginning with those key words that every troubled Philippa (Step 2 above) has got to hear again and again: "My peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you" (v. 27). Being "the Spirit of truth" (v. 17) his work with Philippa includes correcting her misperceptions. High among these will be her failure to grasp how Jesus keeps using that plural "you" (see above, Text Note 1), the point being that his work and presence is centered in the group, not the individual. So also with the Holy Spirit. It's in the group—church, we like to call it—where Jesus'

“words,” batted back and forth between struggling believers, emerge as the Father’s “works” (10b). Sin gets forgiven, it really does (20:23), and peace takes the form of a tangible reality, more wondrous by far and of greater immediate worth than the sudden vanishing, say, of that heap of unpaid bills. It’s in the group that the Spirit will work the miracle. He’ll open Philippa’s eyes. He’ll show her the Father in Jesus and Jesus in the Father. He’ll teach her heart the truth that this God is for her. And when this happens will she still be anxious? Hardly.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) :** *We Razzle, We Dazzle*

In fact now she’s ready to roll. So it’s been from the apostolic beginning with every newly seeing believer. Off she goes, or he, to spread the word and to cloak it in works—their works, strictly construed as deeds shaped by Jesus’ new commandment: “Love one another just as I have loved you” (13:34, v. 15). Philip and company did this and turned the Mediterranean world on its head. Their successors have done the same in other corners of the earth, almost all of them by now. In every case the motive force has been the Holy Spirit fanning endless Jesus-talk and sacramental eating and drinking into compelling faith, a faith whose question—if indeed it questions—is no longer “What’s God doing for me” but only “What’s God doing through me” or more sharply, “through us.” Bubbling up from that are works “greater” than Jesus’ own (v. 12). There are more of them, to put it simply. More, because more tongues and bodies are doing them, Jesus answering the Church’s incessant prayer that more doing be done (v. 14)—more sins forgiven, more hearts encouraged, more fears put to rest, more eyes finally opened to see the Father at last. “I will do it,” Jesus says (v. 14). “Believe me.”