

The Day of Pentecost

BELIEVE ME

John 14:8-17 (25-27)

The Day of Pentecost

Analysis by Norb E. Kabelitz

8Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." 9Jesus said to him, "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'? 10Do 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. 11Believe 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. 12Very 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. 13I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

15If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 16And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. 17This 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.

[25I have said these things to you while I am still with you. 26But 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. 27Peace 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.]

Note 1: Regarding verses 16 and 26, “advocate” (parakleeton) is someone called to one’s side as friend, intercessor, counselor, spokesperson on behalf of, and refers to the Holy Spirit; and in 1 John 2:1 to Jesus Christ.

Note 2: With Pentecost, Easter takes off as a resurrection movement of new life in what will build Christ’s Church. Without Pentecost the Easter Promise of “new” life would be short circuited. Disciples return to fishing. (John 21:1-3) With Pentecost, Easter finds its way into our lives through the Spirit by a “Gospel” which proclaims divine benefits to us and for us that invite and attract faith. The Spirit “calls us by the Gospel.” The Spirit is the “Lord and Giver of Life”; because of the Spirit’s partnership with the Risen Lord, she is God’s faith generator in us and giver of Easter’s Promise. As “Advocate,” the Spirit calls us into her orbit with the Gospel of Easter to generate the experience of a resurrected life now and in the life to come for the Church. The “Advocate” bears witness to and reveals the Father in Jesus Christ, whom to know is “eternal life.”

DIAGNOSIS: Hungry for “God”

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : People Want to “See” God

The basic hunger of humanity is to “see” the God whom no one has “seen” (1:18). Philip’s request, “Show us the Father and we will be satisfied” (v. 8), updates the ancient wish to “see God.” However an ancient caveat from Mt. Sinai warns people not to “break through to the Lord to look; otherwise many of them will perish” (Ex. 19:21). “You cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live.” Moses is allowed however to see the glory of

God's "backside" but "my face shall not be seen" (Ex. 33:18-21). Why are we not permitted to see God's face? I recently read a letter to God by a little girl that said, "Dear God, Are You real? Some people don't believe it. If you are, you'd better do something quick. Love, Harriet Anne" (from John M. Buchanan's, *Children's Letters to God*, Christian Century, Dec. 15, 2009).

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Troubled Hearts*

Jesus seems to imply that "troubled hearts" have their source in "unbelief." Just such "troubled hearts" (Jesus uses this phrase not just once, but twice in John 14) seem to have created a flood of recent writings that question faith in God and in Jesus himself? A couple of years ago, Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and Sam Harris published books arguing for atheism. They denigrate any and all religion, practically inviting lightning bolts from an offended God. On the other hand, a best seller this year by Karen Armstrong is *The Case for God*, which can neither be proven nor disproven in a rational sense. An op-ed piece by Nicholas D. Kristof, ("New York Times," 11-26-09) quotes Ms. Armstrong suggesting that faith belongs to life's mysteries, beyond the world of reason, and people on both sides of the "God gap" make the mistake of interpreting religious traditions too literally," creating a divisive storm of skepticism and theodicy-which she dubs "The Religious Wars." The problem with Philip's question is not that he underestimated Jesus' importance (after all, Philip had persuaded Nathanael with, "We have found the one whom Moses and the prophets wrote about, Jesus of Nazareth, son of Joseph," John 1:45). What is missing is belief, as in confidence (fiducia), in God because of Christ! Philip's "troubled heart" is troubled because he wants to "see God" apart from Jesus.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Without God in the World*

St. Paul seems to say that this disconnect has deadly

consequences: "We are without Christ, aliens, strangers, having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). Be aware this does not suggest that the New Testament is the exclusive source for "God in the world" (see John 5:39). Even so, not to acknowledge God risks being given up by God to a "debased mind" and to all sorts of wickedness (Romans 1:28). When we fail to acknowledge God we are given over to alien powers that would destroy us. In a recent article, "Searching for God" ("Sightings," 12/21/09), Martin Marty quotes a Pew survey that describes us as a "nation of religious drifters ... drawn to a bazaar-tent full of other options." As G.K. Chesterton noted, when people stop believing in God they don't believe in nothing; they believe in everything. (See Thursday Theology #602 by Dr. Ed Schroeder about the movie "Avatar," and Hollywood's apparent gospel of pantheism; also see the "Sightings" article "The Pandora's Box of James Cameron," by Joseph Laycock, 1-28-10.) On the other hand, while some may acknowledge God and want to honor ethical standards established by God (perhaps motivated by politics or religion), even building monuments of the Ten Commandments on public property, they still risk not "knowing God as true" (as trustworthy, John 17:3) because they separate God from Jesus Christ and "his hour" (John 2:4, that is, Good Friday and Easter). Still others ridicule the sacrifice of Jesus as unworthy of the Divine, yet honor the bloody sacrifices of soldiers in war to "save the homeland." What happened to "greater love has no man than to lay down his life for another" when Jesus' sacrifice is involved?

PROGNOSIS: Going to the Father

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *The Words and Works of the Father in Jesus*

The Evangelist had already prefaced his Gospel regarding Jesus by observing, "No one has seen God at any time. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him

known" (John 1:18). As Robert H. Smith says in his commentary on John, Wounded Lord, "The movement is not from knowledge of God to knowledge of Jesus, but the other way around" (p. 134). We therefore seize on Jesus' words and works as evidence of the Father's heart, who "so loved ... that he gave." While Jesus did many wondrous signs, they are signs that point to and involve the gracious heart of God. The Father dwells in Jesus' words and his works (v. 10). They are words and works benefiting the people who have come to know both the Son and the Father. Central to John's good news is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Through this Lamb we journey toward the Father's house where Jesus prepares a place for us. And now the mystery is unveiled, the Father's face-prohibited from sight in its naked form-is now seen in the wounded Lord! "Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases" (Isa. 53:4). Thomas makes this connection when he looks at Jesus' wounds and confesses, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). Indeed, in Jesus "we have seen the Lord" (John 20:25).

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *"Believe me!"* (vv. 11, 12)

So how does one come to "believe"? When does "belief about" become "confidence in"? While we may not be able to "so believe" yet, (Lord, I believe, help my unbelief), the help we ask for is given by an "Advocate" who helps us understand when we "believe it"; who teaches us everything, and reminds us of all that Jesus has said (v. 26). The "shalom" he gives puts to rest the questions that aggravate our heart when "the world" gives us only skeptical criticism and "religious wars." The Advocate testifies to the "for us" of all Jesus says and does. Jesus even suggests that we should expect that the Advocate will inspire us to act in unexpected and wondrous ways (v. 12).

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *We Have Seen the Lord*

“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (v. 9). Having seen in “the wounded Jesus” and the same Risen Lord the face of the Father, we are compelled to love this Lord and seek to find ways to reflect his words and deeds among all people, deeds that are grounded in the Father. In Jesus’ own words, we love the world to the very end (13:1) Given the Advocate we are enabled to “bear fruit,” we pray in Jesus’ name and are answered with God’s Yes to meet the needs of Jesus’ mission (vv. 13, 14). In this journey, we will be accompanied and partnered by an Advocate who shows us that God is true and faithful, dependable and trustworthy. One comment says it all, “The Christian faith has a memory, and to be a Christian is to be enrolled in a tradition as well as to be set free for the future.”