

To the people of Bethlehem Lutheran Church, a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, called out of darkness into light, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

“Lord, show us the Father and it is enough for us,” (John 14:8). Is it ever enough? You know how it works with money. When a raise comes or a bonus, you think, “Finally, this will be enough to make it.” And yet, though the new funds are there, the money always gets consumed. There’s always something more that becomes necessary to life whenever there is extra money on the table. Once you’ve ‘adjusted’ to the new income level, your thoughts turn to the next financial rung and you think, “If only we had another you put the number in the blank.... dollars per month, we’d be good.” We all know how this reasoning goes.

Philip thinks that a brief vision of God the Father will be enough. He’s not concerned with money. He wants proof. “Lord, show us the Father and it is enough for us,” (John 14:8). In other words, “Jesus, show us the Father, and then we’ll believe. If you can show us the Father, then there are no doubts. We’ll believe whatever you say.” Yet as Jesus points out, the very question he asks belies his ignorance, or unbelief.

Seems innocent enough, just show us a glimpse. Simple proof that would lay aside all doubts. You certainly don’t ask such questions, do you? You don’t ask to see just a little miracle, like the healing of a parent or child to prove God’s really listening. You students certainly don’t ask, “Dear heavenly Father, please help me through this semester and then I’ll know that you really care.” You surely don’t ask, “I come to church every Sunday, just give me a little proof that I’m not wasting my time!” Just a little glimpse, and it will be enough for us. You don’t ask those questions, do you?

In sense, it’s understandable to ask this sort of question in a culture where spirituality is often vague. We wonder when so many seem to find God inside themselves whether or not we are looking in the right place. In a culture where universalism is the touchstone and the religious leaders, Christians even, are claiming that we all believe different manifestations of the same God. If we could have just a little glimpse, then we’d know we had made the right choice, choosing to be Christians that is. We just need a glimpse of the glory of the Father, that’s all it’ll take. Then we can stop worrying.

But when such questions are asked, it is tantamount to denying who God is. “How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” Christ demands of Philip. “Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?” (John 14:10). Philip had a hard time believing that Jesus is the Son of God. How can God become man? How can the creator become part of His creation? How can Jesus body and blood be distributed to Christians all over the world at the same time? All of these questions would be cleared up if we could just see the Father for a brief moment. We would then believe, wouldn’t we?

You know this is not true. If we saw God the Father for a brief moment, our sinful hearts would suddenly begin to question whether or not we had really seen the Him. If He really did give us a raise or bonus to ‘prove’ He is God, it

wouldn't be long until we were bargaining with Him again for another one. If He did spare a sick mother or child from death to prove we've made the right choice, it wouldn't be long until we'd be bargaining for another proof, just to make sure, you know.

Each time you try to make a bargain like this, you are trying to come to the Father apart from Christ. Yet, like Alice in the looking glass, the more you strive to approach the Father apart from Christ, the further you will find yourself from Him. The more you try to find the raw power of God apart from His work in Christ, the more terrified and separated from God you will become. "God Himself is a terrible God if we want to deal with Him apart from Christ -- a God in whom we find no comfort but only wrath and displeasure," Dr. Martin Luther wrote.

"Show us the Father and it will be enough for us." Philip's words take on a darker hue. Seeing the Father is a frightening proposition. But more than frightening it's quite delusional. You and I sometimes think we can actually see God. We think we are capable of seeing into the hidden knowledge of God. Trying to see all the intimate workings of this world, trying to calculate at what point in the end times sequence are we, trying to scientifically and logically grasp the mysteries that are the Sacraments of God. Yet in truth, we cannot. For when we try to look into the hidden things of God we can see only the law and the law does not save.

Yet, you and I like the law because it's something we can do. It makes us feel better about ourselves and how far we have progressed. Yet, this is not where the Father, in His love has chosen to be seen. And so Jesus' patient words to Philip, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father... Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me." (John 14:9,11)

And that is why He came. To reveal and deliver the love of the Father. The cornerstone of salvation, has become sin, bearing its damning guilt, He died. Satan has done its worst and placed God into the grave. Sin is done. Death is dead. Jesus is alive, back from the dead, out of the grave, victorious over Satan who can harm us none. God is alive as a Man. And in Him, your sins are forgiven.

And thus Stephen stands before that hateful, violent mob without fear. What can they do to him? If it is time, if his suffering witness is complete, then God will bring him home, but not a moment before. Stephen sees clearly through the dross. The Lord has lovingly disciplined him so that he would not mistake this fallen creation, success, popularity, or an abundance of things, for what God actually desires to give to him. Stephen's expectations about this life are therefore realistic. They come from the Scriptures. He knows that men always resist the Holy Spirit and do evil. But God is still good and still loves men, and the sacrifice of His Son on the cross is enough to forgive even scheming, diabolical murderers. Again and again men reject Him. Again and again, He reaches out to them with grace, forgiveness, and peace.

And do not miss the profound effect of Stephen's dying prayer: Saul is no longer at odds with Stephen. They are brothers in heaven, fellow martyrs of Christ, who have come to their reward. Stephen's prayer was answered. Paul was saved by grace and reconciled to the one he murdered. God is good. Your time, too, will come. Not in some secret rapture, but in the way our Lord tells us, united with him when Lord returns, your place already prepared and with the resurrection of all flesh.

It is easy enough to say, "Look at Christ" or "come to Christ," and it's quite another thing to actually do it. In fact, with man it is impossible. No, looking to Christ involves nothing you do. Looking to Christ involves the work of God in you here in His service. Coming to the Father through Christ occurs when Christ draws you to kneel here at this communion rail and to receive His flesh, heaven on earth and given to you. For you brothers and sisters of Christ, if you want to see the Father, look to Christ. When you want to be where the Father is, go to where Christ is, in His proclaimed Word and given to you in baptism and placed on your lips in the Holy Supper. He comes to you and gives himself to you. He comes to you to give you mercy, forgiving your sins and giving you life and salvation.

So what is enough for you? Is another paycheck enough? A raise? Perhaps a good grade on the next test. What would be enough for you? Healing from your disease? You still want simple proof? This man Jesus, who was crucified is risen from the dead, standing at the right hand of God. He has chosen you, marked you with his holy cross in baptism as one redeemed by Christ the crucified. Do not let your hearts be troubled, you are a chosen people, a holy nation, called out of darkness into his marvelous light, you have received the mercy of God, for your sins are forgiven. He has provided for you all you need in this body and life and has given you the way, the truth, and life and has prepared your place with him and brings you to himself.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.