

John 14:8-17

Phillip said, “Just show us the Father.” It has echoes of Exodus 33, when Moses asked to see God’s glory. But the Hebrew people believed that if a sinful human being saw God, they would die. Even Moses did not get to see the glory of God, just the “shadow of its passing.” You sure you want that, Phillip?

The Gospel of John is written to a Greek audience. In Greek thought, God was pure spirit, and there was nothing to see anyway.

But Jesus responds with an incredible claim: If you have seen me, you have seen the Father. The three persons of the Trinity are distinct, but also inseparable. The Father is in the Son. The Spirit that filled Jesus at the start of his ministry communicated the presence of the Father. Likewise, when we are filled with the Holy Spirit, he brings the presence of the Father and the Son into our lives. Jesus was not acting on his own. The Father was working through him, in his words and actions. “Believe it based on what you have seen me do.”

To see Jesus is to see the Father. In John 1:18, he writes that “No one has seen God. But the Son, who is himself God, is near to the Father’s heart.” Philip may not have seen the Father, but he saw Jesus. And to see Jesus is to know the heart of God.

Because the Spirit will come and fill the Church, as Jesus says in verse 17, the Church can do the same works as Christ and even greater works. Works could mean righteous deeds, or miraculous works, or both. I think we should read it as both.

That might seem impossible. How could we do greater works than Jesus? Well, the works of the Body of Christ are greater than Jesus’ works in at least one way: There are more of them:

Jesus never left the borders of the land of Canaan in his ministry. He never went further north than Tyre and Sidon, south than Jerusalem, or east than the Decapolis, which was Old Testament Gilead. But the Church has carried the gospel to every corner of the globe. Jesus performed dozens of miracles and healed perhaps hundreds of people, it seems. It’s debated among Christians if miracles persist to this day. I think they do, but even if they don’t, the Church has built clinics and hospitals around the world and healed millions. Even if only a small fraction of claimed miracles are real, that’s still far more than Jesus did. Jesus fed 5000 men, plus women and children. The Church has fed many millions. So the claim might be incredible, but it is absolutely true.

Jesus makes another incredible claim, “You can ask for anything in my name, and I will do it.” I think it’s important to say this is not *carte blanche* to think we can just pray for something and throw Jesus’ name in there and expect him to do it!

Hebrew people believed that especially pious people could pretty much guarantee their prayers would be answered. Elijah is a good example. But Jesus seems to universalize this idea, applying it to all believers.

But what does it mean to pray in Jesus’ name? Name can mean reputation. To pray in Jesus’ name could mean on his behalf, in his stead, by his command, as his representative, in his will. But there’s something more: In Scripture, name was often used to signify the essence of a person and their character. Jesus only promises he will answer our prayers if we are praying according to the essence of who he is and in keeping with his character. So we can’t pray for our enemies to drop dead in Jesus’ name, because that is not in keeping with Jesus’ essence, character, or will.

But, if we are praying in keeping with these things, then he promises he will grant our prayer. I guess what that means is that if we pray and we never receive the answer we want, then we were not praying in keeping with his will, character, and essence. The hardest prayer to pray is “not my will, but yours be done.”

And we should keep the next verse in mind, too: “If you love me, keep my commandments.” Our love for Jesus is never just a feeling, never just something we say. Our love is lived out in doing what he tells us to. It is the only way that we can love God, by our obedience. I was reading for this sermon and I came across a quote from a Methodist theologian named Charles K. Barrett: “Never allow love to devolve into a sentiment or emotion. Its expression is always moral and is revealed in obedience.”

So Jesus is leaving, but the Spirit, whom he calls the Paraclete will come. The Greek word Paraclete means “one called alongside,” as in called alongside to help. Many words have been proposed as a translation: Advocate, counselor, helper, encourager, intercessor, and comforter.

I personally think comforter is a good word if we know its origins. It means “with strength.” The Spirit strengthens us for the work Jesus asks us to do. He helps us live a life of obedience and resist sin. He helps us know the truth. And he helps us to do the work Jesus prescribes. The task Jesus gives us is difficult, but we are not alone in the task.