Show Us

October 11, 2026
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John 14:8-14 (CEB)
Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father; that will be enough for us.”

9 Jesus replied, “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been with you all this time? Whoever has seen me
has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? 10 Don’t you believe that I am in the Father and the
Father is in me? The words I have spoken to you I don’t speak on my own. The Father who dwells in me does
his works. 11 Trust me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or at least believe on account
of the works themselves. 12 I assure you that whoever believes in me will do the works that I do. They will do
even greater works than these because I am going to the Father. 13 I will do whatever you ask for in my name, so
that the Father can be glorified in the Son. 14 When you ask me for anything in my name, I will do it.

“Whoever believes in me will do the works that I do. They will do even greater works than these.” Wait…what? Greater works than Jesus? Really? Jesus walked on water, so does that mean we’ll walk on air? He fed 5,000 with five loaves and two fish, so will we feed 10,000? He raised Lazarus from the dead, so will we be able to make people immortal?

It seems rather apparent that we aren’t meant to take this literally, though we note that some of the disciples did, in fact, perform many miracles in Jesus’s name. But if that isn’t what Jesus meant, what *did* he mean?

To understand what is going on in this conversation between Jesus and the disciples in their final moments together, we need to zoom out and look at the whole sequence of events. They gathered in the Upper Room to celebrate the Passover, in what would be the last meal they would share. Before dinner, Jesus got down on the floor and washed their feet, an action typically expected of a servant. Then he told them they should follow his example and lead through acts of humble service. He gave them a new commandment: to love one another as he had loved them. And he said that people would know they were his followers not by what they believed or the miracles they performed, but by the way they loved.

Now he is saying goodbye. He tells them that he is going to prepare a place for them, and he says that they know the way to where he is going. Thomas says, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going. So how can we know the way?”

Jesus answers, “I am the way.” And he says that if they know him, they know God.

The disciples are confused. They don’t want Jesus to leave. They don’t understand where he is going or why he needs to prepare a place for them there. And they don’t understand what he means about knowing God, or what that has to do with his leaving.

Philip speaks up. “Jesus, if you can just show us God, that will be enough for us.”

What do you think Philip meant? Did he expect Jesus to pull back the veil between this life and eternity for a moment? That he would give them the ability to see things only he could? That there was a place Jesus could take them where they could somehow gaze into heaven and see God? If we’re honest, we’re a little confused at this point, too.

Jesus appears to scold Philip. “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been with you all this time?” Maybe Jesus was surprised that they didn’t understand him. Maybe he was frustrated that after so much time spent together, they still didn’t get what he was here to do. Or maybe his words weren’t an admonition, but an invitation to move beyond literal *seeing* to a deeper truth. Maybe this was a teaching moment, and Jesus was patiently leading him to the point so they could see for themselves. And if he was patient with Philip, maybe he’s inclined to be patient with us when we struggle to understand, too.

Jesus wants the disciples to realize that they *already have* everything they need. They have been with Jesus for three years, traveling with him throughout the Galilee, Judea, and Samaria. They have witnessed miracles. They have seen lives transformed. They have experienced hope and shared that hope with people who so desperately need it. All that time, they were doing more than just watching Jesus. They were seeing God in action.

But then Jesus says something even more astonishing: They will do the things that he has done, and they will do even greater things.

I don’t think Jesus meant that they would perform bigger, more impressive miracles than he did. But the sheer act of carrying on his work would impact the world in profound ways. Jesus’s ministry was never about the miracles, anyway. It was about the kingdom of God to which those miracles pointed. In the kingdom of God, there are no winners and losers, no brokenness, no injustice, no suffering. And if that is the way it is in the kingdom of God, we can start to live that way here and now. The disciples have a powerful message of hope to share. Jesus is preparing them to go and proclaim that message to the ends of the earth.

But before they go, they need to learn to see differently. Philip asks Jesus to show them God. Jesus says, “You’ve *already* seen God.” That’s what all of this has been about. God isn’t in some distant place, watching from afar. Jesus is the incarnation of God. He is Emmanuel: God-with-us. And what does God look like? Like someone who stands between an angry mob and a woman caught in adultery. Like someone who cares for people society discards. Like someone who sees a gathering crowd not as an annoying disruption, but looks on them with compassion. Like someone who will give his very life…not just for his friends, but for the whole world, including those who reject him, mock him, beat him, and nail him to a cross.

And they need to see that the presence of God is in them, too. Jesus promises to be with them always, and to send the Holy Spirit to give them the strength they need to carry on his work. They will come to see themselves in a different light – not just as followers, but leaders who share the living presence of God through acts of love and service. By extension, we who walk in their footsteps today as fellow disciples and followers of Jesus need to see ourselves the same way. The love of God, the presence of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit is within us, too, guiding us to pursue God’s hope for every life.

But to do that, we also need to see the people around us differently – the way that Jesus sees them. We’re not locked in a battle with the world around us. We are called to share the unconditional love of God that draws *all* people into a life-changing relationship with God. That is the only answer to the fear and division that tears us apart.

That kind of love is profoundly counter-cultural. We live in a world that has grown cynical, where love has become transactional…if it means anything at all. How do we demonstrate God’s love in a “what’s in it for me?” world, a world obsessed with winning at all costs, a world that values being *right* more than being *good*?

It begins with rejecting the “us vs. them” mentality that continually tears us further apart, especially during the height of election season. We need stop seeing people as “others” and realize that we are all interconnected. God created *all* of us in God’s image and placed us in this world together. *And it’s the only world we’ve got.* What affects one affects us all, whether we are aware of it or not. *Of course* we will disagree. We’re not all the same. We have different opinions, different values, different aspirations. And we often feel strongly about those things. But there is much we hold in common, too. We all have hopes and dreams. We all long for a better

world. And we are *all* beloved of God, including the people we don't like. We can choose to tear each other apart, or we can love each other into deeper relationship.

We can also learn to see beyond the fear that keeps us apart. Think about the campaign ads that we see every day. How many of them are positive? How many of them try to not only paint the opponent in a negative light, but to convince you that voting for them will bring disastrous consequences? In a climate of attack ads and algorithms designed to keep feeding us content that reinforces our polarization, we are made to believe that not only is the candidate a terrible person, but anyone who supports them is either equally bad, a fool, or both. But we don't have to be driven by fear. And we shouldn't promote it, either.

We can start by seeing people as more than one-dimensional. Every person has a story, every story is a life, and every life matters to God. When we remember that, we are more inclined to look on people with grace. We also might develop a curiosity to learn more about them and why they do what they do. David Brooks, author and columnist for the Atlantic, has written for many years about world affairs, politics, and culture. But over the last several years, he has shifted his focus to be more philosophical, exploring character and human relationships. Brooks states, "I no longer ask 'What you believe?' but 'How did you come to believe that?'"[1] The first question separates people into categories. The second invites a story.

Apple TV's blockbuster series *Ted Lasso* is about an American football coach who suddenly finds himself coaching a Premier League soccer team in West London. At first, no one seems to get his unassuming, folksy, relational style. But as the series progresses, his gift for seeing people and connecting with them through their stories becomes more apparent.

In one of the best scenes from any show I have ever seen, Ted and team owner Rebecca are confronted by Rupert, Rebecca's cocky and obnoxious ex-husband. When Rupert belittles Rebecca in front of a pub full of fans, Ted intervenes. Glancing up at a dartboard, he suggests a wager. If Rupert wins, he can choose the team's starting lineup for the last two games of the season. If Ted wins, Rupert will stay away from Rebecca and the team. Rupert, an experienced dart-thrower, thinks he has this in the bag as he pulls his set of custom darts from his pocket. He assumes this uncultured country boy is no match. He's further encouraged when he carries a commanding lead into the last round. But Ted has a few surprises. Take a look. (Video clip shown in worship.)

Be curious, not judgmental. Now, Walt Whitman never actually said that, but that doesn't diminish the wisdom of the quote. Don't make assumptions. Be curious. We can learn something from everyone we meet. And we might find that their story is much more nuanced than the story a we created in our minds about them.

When Philip asked Jesus to show them God, Jesus instead invited Philip and the other disciples to look more closely at what was right in front of them, to see with the eyes of faith. Friends, when we learn to see with the eyes of faith, we are no longer content to see people as obstacles to be overcome, but children of God to be loved. *We all want to be seen. We all want to be known. We all want to be loved.*

I don't know whether we will do greater works than Jesus, or by what measure we would determine if we did. But Jesus invites us first to look more closely. When we do, we might see something we never expected to see. May God grant us the eyes of faith, so we can see the way Jesus does. Amen.