

“Just a little more”

Beyond anxiety in the human search for meaning

April 20, 2008

Text: Psalm 33:13-22, John 14:1-14

I.

This reading from John 14, that I just shared with you, is part of what are known as the *farewell discourse speeches* of Jesus, in John’s gospel. Long, serpentine monologues, they are intriguing in many ways. To begin with, right away, they invite us in.

Imagine—a farewell speech. Your last speech or sermon or words of love and affection to those whom you most love. What would you say?

And if the person making the speech were Jesus, and we were his followers, how would we react? What would we expect him to say? What would we want him to say? And no matter what he said or how he said it, how would we feel about it all?

Wouldn’t we, like Thomas or Philip, be more than a little uncertain about things? Don’t we all get a little upset and anxious about *endings*?

To make matters worse, in these discourse speeches of Jesus, there’s a lot of strange talk. Jesus talks about going ahead of the disciples and preparing a place for them. *Umm*, they might have wondered, *where’s he going with that?* Then he adds:

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.

Right away, the disciple Thomas pipes up, saying:

Lord, we don’t know where you are going. How can we know the way? What he may have meant to say was What on earth are you talking about?

And then Jesus announces some of his most famous words: ***I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also.***

II.

Okay, fair enough! But what does it all mean? The way Jesus links himself to God—to the Father—and all so easily, as if there’s no distinction. Later, he makes his point even more strongly saying,

Believe me, that I am in the Father and the Father is in me ...

But by now, Philip is both confused and troubled; and he wants more:

Lord, show us the Father, he says, and we will be satisfied!

What Philip wants is *just a little more*. Can we blame him? Don't we sometimes, too, want just a little more?

- Just a little more certitude?
- Just a little more confirmation?
- Just a little more assurance?
- Even a little more *satisfaction*, perhaps?

Lord, show us the Father, and then we'll be satisfied! Would you be satisfied? Would I? Intriguing question; are we satisfied with our lives and with our faith journey?

III.

A man saw a new car in a parking lot one day and he noticed the *dealership license plate* in the front that read **Completely Satisfied**.

Wow! If you think about it, that's an audacious claim to make about any automobile—**completely satisfied**.

Later, this same man—a man of faith—began to reflect on this ... *what if God asked him to wear a sign around his neck that says **Completely Satisfied***? Would he be willing to do it? Was he indeed **completely satisfied** with God?

With all of the various ups and downs of life ... the lost jobs ... the troubling health reports ... the worrying about children and other family members and friends.

How about us? Are we **completely satisfied** as people of faith?

Lord, show us the Father, and then we'll be satisfied!

Friends, if we tell the truth, Philip is NOT making some trivial, unimportant request, is he? Like so many of us ... in so many facets of our lives ... he wants *just a little more*.

Multi-millionaire, John D. Rockefeller was asked one time, how much a person needs to feel financially secure in life? Without blinking an eye, he answered back: *just a little more*.

IV.

As we reflect on all of this, it's normal and natural for us to want to feel secure in our lives ... to feel like we have enough of the basic necessities so our families will be okay.

We want enough income, for our daily provisions and so forth; enough reassurance in our relationships. We all want to feel loved and needed and valued. We want reassurance, too, in our health ... and in our journey of faith.

And to the extent, therefore, that we feel a gap, or a widening chasm, between what we have ... and what we think we need, we're anxious.

Understandably, as human beings, we become anxious—even fearful—when we feel insecure or a lack of reassurance about any of these areas. We want to be in control. We want to feel a sense of reassurance—about our income and our relationships; about our health and our walk with God.

Lord, show us the Father, and then we'll be satisfied.

You see, friends, we get it. What Philip wants and what we want, too, is ***Just a little more***. A little more insight, a little more knowledge, a little more love and good feelings.

Sometimes, what we want are more assurances about God and faith than it's humanly possible to have. But, hey, that's the *human situation*. The problem is, we can only be reassured so much—about anything. There comes a point where we have to *let go* and turn it over to God.

Faith is *believing in things unseen*. We know that, intellectually; but sometimes we'd sure like seeing a whole lot more.

V.

As children of God and people of faith, we're challenged all the time to *build up trust in God*. Yet, it's not something that just comes to us naturally, is it? We build up trust through acts of love and kindness.

This takes time, as we all know. Trust in God and faith in God come over time; but they also come through our deeds of love ... of caring and compassion and kindness.

Our soul waits for the Lord, says the Psalmist. ***Our heart is glad in the Lord***. Why? ***Because we trust in the Lord's holy name***. And then, going on: ***Let your steadfast love be upon us, Lord, as we place our hope in you***.

What's both inviting and tantalizing about our faith is that we can't control it. It's not about us; it's about God.

There comes a point, therefore, when—simply and plainly—we have to TRUST God. We have to turn it over. Work hard ... do our best ... pray fervently ... hope for the best ... and then LET GO. Now, that's a plan!

Letting go and trusting God is what we do to feel at home in the universe; or to feel at home on planet earth, in these United States of America, and in our communities and our families.

We can only control so much. We can only know so much. No matter how much or how hard we study. No matter how intelligent and educated we are. No matter how efficient we are; at some point, we have to trust God.

Again, the problem with Philip, like some of us, perhaps, is that he wants more assurances about faith than is possible. Part of what we're saying here is that there are limits to how certain we can be about anything. About safety, security and about God; which prompts the question: *how much do we need to know?*

VI.

As we live out our lives—always—there's some element of risk involved. On an intellectual level, we know this. Life is risky—all the time, every day. And that's a good thing.

For without risk, there's no mystery and wonder, there's no hilarity and laughter, there's no adventure and human search for meaning.

How dull!

Jesus tries to be reassuring to Philip and the rest of the disciples but my guess is that his answers on this side of the Easter experience were not ultimately that satisfying.

Lord, show us the Father and then we'll be satisfied.

Always, we want more, *just a little more*. Why? Because we don't want to feel anxious about tomorrow.

But you know, *some* amount of anxiety is okay. No matter how much confidence and hope we have as human beings—as people of faith—still, we're not robots; we're not stones. There's always some element of anxiety involved.

VII.

Our faith doesn't give us the reassurance of certainty. But it does give us the reassurance of LOVE. And that's the point. That's what moves us forward ...

CHECK IT OUT! There's nothing wrong with *wanting* more ... or with having passion for all kinds of things—certainly for life.

The key is to live out the *wanting* and the *longing*, the *passion* for more of life—for a closer walk with God, for a deeper bond to one another—to live it out—through the anxiety, through the fear, with daily acts of kindness and love.

Put another way: the way we get to a deeper experience of God is through a life centered in LOVE ... and then, we'll be more than satisfied.

Because THEN we'll know what the Apostle Paul had learned in his own faith journey: ***to be content in all things*** (Philippians 4). And THEN we'll know what the *Psalmist* knew—that through whatever peaks and valleys might come our way—***The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want.***

That's it! ***Let your steadfast love be upon us, Lord, as we place our hope in you.***

All praise be unto God! Amen!

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