

IN: "I am in the Father and the Father is in me" John 14:11

Sunday 17 January 2016 – West Kirby URC

Brief intro

- Continuing in the 'I am' series.

John 14 v 11

7 If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."

8 Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."

9 Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who 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 that the Father is in me?"

So it's that final part of the reading, "I am in the Father" that is in focus this evening.

In

As is usual for me, this has been quite hard to prepare. I first found these words very abstract. I found them fairly easy to understand, at least on the surface, but very hard to apply. Very hard to make practical use of.

And the more I thought about them, the less sense they made to me.

I spent a while thinking about what it might mean for Jesus to be *in* the Father. In the Father...? What does that really mean?

I thought about the simple word 'in'. I even looked in a dictionary!

'In' carries various overlapping ideas:-

1/ It carries the idea of *location*. We say that London is in England. The map is in the car. It speaks of whereabouts.

2/ It carries the idea of *containment*. The beauty in the landscape. For example we can't say "the box is in the matches" because a match can't contain its box.

But Jesus breaks this rule a bit. He says that the Father and He are in each other. And of course the only way this can be possible is if Jesus and the Father share one nature. But most of us will already know this, and I couldn't see how to make a whole sermon out of just that!

And it all seems so confusing and abstract. Not very useful. Not very practical.

Dissatisfaction with spiritual experience

So I tried pondering verses preceding the central 'I am' verse. And straight away, there is something interesting. There is a note of frustration, even pointed challenge to Jesus contained in Phillip's request. Jesus plainly says 'you've seen the father' and gets the retort "show us the father!"

He says show us the Father and 'that will be enough'. I had a bit of a look at the Greek and that word 'enough' includes the idea of being content and sufficing. The NRSV (my fave!) translates it 'satisfied'. "Show us the Father and we will be satisfied"

Phillip doesn't feel he has enough, he doesn't feel satisfied. He feels short changed!

And I think that is something that most of us feel in our walk with God at times. How many of us secretly wish that God was a bit more on the case? That He would do some more miracles? That He would be a bit less obscure and hard to see? That he'd just *show up* a bit more?

Phillip wants Jesus to show him the Father directly. He wants God to show up, right here, right now. He is wanting a direct visual manifestation of the presence of the Father.

What have I missed?

But Jesus seems to imply that he has missed something fundamental. He says "Don't you know me?" The word translated as 'know' also contains ideas such as 'to recognise' and 'to perceive'. Jesus is saying, 'haven't you got it yet?'

What has he missed?

Perhaps Phillip wants God to rehearse one of his spectacular Old Testament appearances.

There's a few examples, but just to pick one, Ezekiel (Ch. 1) gives us a clear visual description.

4 I looked, and I saw a windstorm coming out of the north—an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The centre of the fire looked like glowing metal, 5 and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures. In appearance their form was human, 6 but each of them had four faces and four wings.

But at the end of the chapter, the writer states that
This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.

So even here we aren't actually given a direct face-to-face visual encounter. I was intrigued by Peter's words last week when he spoke about some of the OT appearances of God may have been the Son rather than the Father.

I wonder if this reluctance of the Father to directly show Himself is significant. I'd like to read a few words by Rowan Williams which touch directly on this question.

"In the old Jerusalem, the heart of the city was the Temple, and the heart of the temple was the throne, the kapporeth, or mercy-set – the empty space above the Ark of the Covenant, between the two golden cherubim.

....

To go and see God in Jerusalem ... is to look at the curtained holy place and to know that behind it is the empty space from which mercy and promise come forth..."

Hmmm... 'empty space' a refusal to show himself.

But we know that God is real, that He exists. We know that he acts and speaks and changes things. So why can't we see him? Why doesn't he just 'show up?'

Show us the father

Well that takes us back to Phillip again. "Show us the Father". Jesus has already said that Phillip does know the Father, so it's perhaps no surprise that Jesus very gently reprimands Phillip. But it's good for us that Phillip asked his question, because it helps make clear something very important about our faith.

Again, Jesus says 'you've seen me, so you've seen the Father'. You're already looking at him! You have what you're asking for already but you don't know it! You can't see it!

God is Spirit (John 4:24). And we can't see spirit. We can't see heaven. So God can't appear as a material thing without His nature being changed. He isn't flesh and blood, mere material. He is spirit. So when he shows himself, what we see is an image (Ezekiel), a sign (Miracle), a metaphor, but rarely, if ever the actual 'real thing.'

Here's the good news!

But, and this is truly amazing, the Father is contained by and located in Jesus. The Father is there, amongst them. But Phillip hasn't seen, he hasn't perceived. Jesus is the fullness of the Father revealed.

I said just now that the Father cannot show himself without changing his nature, well, that's exactly what he does in Jesus. He changes himself by fusing Himself, his spirit with human flesh. He puts himself inside a person (Jesus) and then he can be physically seen and heard... "The father is in me and I am in the father."

Jesus is the absolute real raw presence, all the fullness of God, right here right now. The father made visible, spirit somehow available, accessible in the form of flesh. That is astonishing, and very important. Jesus' life, every breath, every glance is one constant ultra-detailed, up close and very personal view of the Father.

Perhaps that is why John starts his first letter like this:-

1 John 1

1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. 2 The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.

Now this is vital. This is what Phillip missed; he has seen the Father, he has seen what occupies that empty space between the Cherubim. He's literally seen, touched and heard the very essence of the Father; mercy and promise.

He hasn't seen a metaphor. He hasn't seen just a likeness, a copy. He hasn't constructed something from his imagination and memories. Jesus is our holy place. His life, in every detail, in every last trivial contour is the presence of God.

But there's more!

That's amazing enough, but there's even better to come. A little later in John, Jesus prays this:-

John 17:20

20 "My prayer is not for them alone [the disciples]. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us....

Jesus prays that we may be one; that we, incredibly, may be in the Father and Son. And Paul drills into this again and again in his letters. He says in *Galatians 3* "all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

We who are baptized into Christ, are in Christ Jesus, and therefore we are in the son. We are located in Christ and we are contained in Christ.

And we are one, because we are in the one Spirit, the spirit of Jesus Christ, who is God from God.

The very next part of Jesus' prayer is:-

May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

And it's clear why! Because if you and me are in Christ, one with the Father, then the extent to which we submit to [are baptized / immersed in] Jesus is the extent to which the Father is visibly present to the world. [Repeat and emphasise] (we = church)

We, the Church, have the awesome potential to be the real, raw, right here, right now presence of God in the world just as Jesus was.

That is the central message I wanted to bring today. That we, the church, the people of God, carry this awesome privilege and responsibility. In every last detail, every trivial little moment, every contour of our lives we can be the presence of God.

Finish

Let me read a little more from the same essay by Rowan Williams:-

If we are drawn into the words and acts and passions of Jesus so that (as Paul said) his life and death are at work in us, we become sanctuaries to each other, holy places, mercy seats: and at the last, when we come to be lastingly at home with God and the lamb, this process will be complete. We shall speak God's name to each other in the very act of our being.

We have left our sanctuary to meet in this hall for a while, so let's take this an opportunity to be reminded and inspired to be sanctuaries to each other; places of safety and rest, places of restoration and healing.

Let's take this opportunity, this temporary displacement, to be reminded of how we are fundamentally, deeply, irrevocably, truly one in the spirit.

And let's be challenged to live out this truth, so that (as Jesus' prayer is inevitably answered) WK will know that the Father has sent Jesus.

Thanks.