

“Joining the Family Business”

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Third in a series on John 14

John 14.6-14

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Jesus answered, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you have really known me, you will also know the Father. From now on you know him and have seen him.”*

Philip said, *“Lord, show us the Father; that will be enough for us.”*

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’? 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. 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.*

“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. I will do whatever you ask for in my name, so that the Father can be glorified in the Son. When you ask me for anything in my name, I will do it.

John 14.6-14

Common English Bible

You'd think they'd have already figured him out. They'd been with Jesus for a long time. They'd been eye-witnesses.

Things God does, they saw Jesus do. He'd turned water into wine, because God loves a celebration. He'd calmed a storm and walked on water, because God rules creation. He'd fed hungry crowds, because God provides. He'd healed people, because God rescues sufferers. He'd forgiven sins, because God pours out mercy. He'd raised the dead, because God gives life. They saw Jesus do all these things. Did they get it? No!

Things we can only rightly say about God, they'd heard Jesus say about himself. *“I am the bread of life. I am the good shepherd. I am the living water. I am the light of the world. I am the resurrection and the life.* Jesus a few seconds earlier, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life.”* They'd heard Jesus say all these things. Did they get it? No!

Do we?

It's Philip, one of the first to follow, who asks. *“Lord, show us [God] the Father. That will be enough for us.”*

I can hear Jesus pleading with them. Like, “*What more do I have to do to convince you?*”¹

If we don't know who Jesus is, we won't know who we are. Nor will we do *what we can do*.

II

Remember Jesus talking about his “Father's house”? The Hebrew phrase is *bêt 'āb*. It's a building. It's also A family: dad, mom, children, adult sons, their wives and kids, unmarried daughters, grandparents, others too.² Like everyone else, Jesus grew up in a *bêt 'āb*: Mary, Joseph, their children. And they had a family business.³

Imagine young-man Jesus working away. Someone sees him. “*You must be Joseph's boy. You're a spitting image of him. Looking at you using those tools, the way you measure and cut, how your tongue sticks out . . . just like your dad.*” Of course. As a boy Jesus watched his dad work, learned to do it with him, and now works like him.

Well, Jesus describes the Divine, which he is part of, as a father-and-son relationship. If he reminds people of Joseph, how much more does Jesus reflect God his Father. He's God's spitting image.

Jesus uses this human relationship to describe the God-relationship, but it's even more intimate, more unified.

I am in the father and the Father is in me. If you have really known me, you know the Father. When you've seen me, you've seen the Father. What I say are the Father's words. The things I do are the Father working through me.

III

Now, listen to what Jesus does next. He invites us to join this Divine family business! Those first disciples. You and me. All of us!

If you are running a construction business, don't hire me. If you're running the God-business, would you hire those first disciples? Their following-Jesus resumes are spotty. They're pretty slow. When they're not getting in the way, they've gotten lost. They're all about to come crashing down.

Jesus has seen all this, and he knows what's going to happen. Still, he says:

¹ Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John, A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 816.

² Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel* (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 39.

³ The Bible uses a Greek word, *tehton*, to describe Jesus (and Joseph's) line of work. It had a broad meaning, beyond “carpenter.” It could describe any job that involved fashioning things from materials. Given the relative shortage of trees around Nazareth at the time, some suggest it was likely Jesus was a stone mason. See aleteia.org/2019/02/08/were-jesus-and-joseph-really-carpenters.

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. I will do whatever you ask for in my name, so that the Father can be glorified in the Son. When you ask me for anything in my name, I will do it.

Is this one time we can say, with certainty, that Jesus was mistaken?⁴

We'll do more than him? He's . . . fended off every temptation Evil could throw at him; faced down the world's brokenness and despair; carried away in himself the guilt and shame of everyone's sin; looked Death in the face and defeated it once and for all; and all that other stuff I mentioned earlier. There is God-work that only Jesus could do, and he did it.

However, the duration of his in-the-flesh working was only a few years. It's distance was only a few-days of walking. He completed everything he needed to do. Then he launched us into the ongoing work of living out his salvation within the life of the whole world, into every place, so it touches and transforms every person.

This is the God-family business. You're hired!

IV

That's a risky HR decision. You know what we're like!

There's a prayer-poem, attributed to Teresa of Ávila (she lived in the 1500s in Spain). She probably did not write it.⁵ Still, it's good.

*Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.*

That's encouraging. What you do matters. Your actions can be holy.

Unfortunately, it can feed an unhealthy tendency some of us have.

⁴ Bruner, 817.

⁵ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teresa_of_%C3%81vila#Excerpts

Rev. Dr. James Forbes has a lot of experience and wisdom. He's led a variety of congregations. Someone asked him the difference between mostly-White and mostly-Black congregations. He said this:

*In predominately white congregations people believe God needs them;
in predominately black churches, people understand they need God.*⁶

Listening to that poem, I might suppose Jesus needs me. That without me or us, he can't see. That without us, he can't feel. That without us, he can't act, do good, or bless.

That's preposterous!

I don't think it's what St. Teresa or whoever wrote it meant. But it's a danger in our church tradition.

V

Maybe this pandemic is knocking some much-needed sense into us. Without Jesus working in us, we're not doing much of anything. We need God!

Jesus promises, "*When you ask me for anything in my name, I will do it.*" 'In Jesus' name' is not a magic phrase we tack onto our prayers, like extra postage to make sure the message gets through. "*In Jesus' name*" means fitting with his purposes, his mission, his love, his character, and his grace.

Jesus promises, "*I will do whatever you ask for in my name, so that the Father can be glorified in the Son.*" God is glorified when people see how God is at work. When they see that, they celebrate God.

That's the family business. It's God — Father and Son — working through us and others. We pray because we need our work orders. We pray because we need Jesus to work through us; we can't do his work without him.

Maybe our problem is, we don't ask enough. We don't expect enough. We start thinking that we have to do it all ourselves, and even that God is depending on us to do it ourselves.

Jesus wants us to be expectant pray-ers.⁷ "*Come on! Ask me!*" he's saying. "*Ask in my name.*" (In other words, "in my cause.") "*Ask so the Father maybe be glorified in the Son.*" (In other words, "so people will see me," says Jesus.)⁸ *Ask. Ask, and see what business we will do together. Amen.*

⁶ Anthony B. Robinson asked Forbes the question, and recalled the conversation in his blog post, "Turns out the UCC is mostly white," September 3, 2020,

www.anthonbrobinson.com/turns-out-the-ucc-is-mostly-white/

⁷ Bruner, 818.

⁸ Ibid.