***“If You Know Me”*** by S. Finlan, for The First Church, May 10, 2020

**John 14:1–12**

1“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. 2In my Father’s house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3And 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. 4And you know the way to the place where I am going.” 5Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” 6Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

8 Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.”9Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, “Show us the Father”? 10Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. 11Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. 12Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.”

When Jesus tells his apostles that he goes to prepare a place for them in the afterlife (John 14:2), he is not promising to make everything easy or to make their decisions for them, but he is indicating there is an organized plan for them in the afterlife. He is giving them hope. The afterlife will not be chaotic. It’s as though he were greeting them when they arrive, saying, “welcome; you belong here.” So much of Jesus’ message is a statement of welcome and hospitality.

Now Philip asks a fairly foolish question. Jesus had just said “If you know me, you will know my Father also” (14:7), and now Philip asks to be shown the Father, literally. He fails to understand that Jesus’ whole job is showing us the Father. We cannot see the Infinite God directly. But we can see his incarnated Son, and that is why the Son came. Spiritually speaking, the Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Father. But we cannot materially see the Father. Stated otherwise, the *way* that we see the Father is by seeing the Son. The Son reveals the Father. “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (14:9).

Similar statements occur throughout the second half of the Gospel of John, showing that how we respond to the Son is how we are responding to the Father. We find the same idea, of the Son as *Revealer* of the Father, in the Pauline letters. Colossians says that Jesus “is the image of the invisible God” (1:15). Therefore, study Jesus. By studying Jesus, you will learn about God.

The goodness, generosity, and willingness to share and to delegate that we see in Jesus tells us what God is like. Jesus delegated to his apostles, handing his revelation over them, saying “whoever listens to you listens to me” (Luke 10:16). This seems to be a principle in God’s system. If you have received something from God, you are empowered to hand it on.

The way that Jesus included and honored people shows God’s willingness to include and uplift people. Think of when Jesus encouraged the tax collector who was disliked by his neighbors by saying “he too is a son of Abraham” (Luke 19:9). In contrast to the guy’s neighbors, Jesus was restoring the guy’s self-respect. Son of Abraham was a label of great honor.

We also see that Jesus encouraged people before healing them, saying “take heart, son, your sins are forgiven” or “take heart, daughter, your faith has saved you” (Matthew 9:2, 22, “saved” is from NABRE). He is building people up and giving them a basis for self-respect, as well as healing them. This reveals God’s own desire to include people and to restore their self-respect. I see this principle of God’s inclusiveness in such Old Testament passages as Psalm 68: “Father of orphans and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation. God gives the desolate a home to live in” (Ps 68:5–6). Passages from the Psalms and prophets speak of the generosity and loving-kindness of God. But Jesus is the one who really demonstrated it.

There was the time when Jesus defended a woman who was being criticized for anointing his feet with ointment, saying “Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me” (Mark 14:6). Even though the criticism had a moralistic tone (the money for the ointment could have been “given to the poor,” 14:5), it was unfair and bullying criticism, and Jesus rejects it; he says “let her alone.” Surely this shows that God would honor the woman’s sincere respectfulness instead of the moralistic and judgmental bullying. We can tell what God’s attitude is by looking at Jesus’ attitude, not at that of the powerful and respected people in society.

In another example of Jesus’ responsiveness, we read of a blind man shouting to him, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Luke 18:38). The disciples hurried over to hush him up, but Jesus had him brought forward and asked “‘What do you want me to do for you?’ He said, ‘Lord, let me see again.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Receive your sight; your faith has saved you’” (Luke 18:41–42). The disciples were probably trying to preserve proper decorum and protect Jesus’ status, but Jesus was more interested in the honest faith of this needy person. This tells us something about God’s own kindness and receptivity, and lack of interest in decorum.

We learn about God from Jesus. In fact, we really need to rethink our ideas of God based on our knowledge of Jesus. We have carried along too many ancient and wrong ideas about God. But the change goes beyond just our ideas. We should emulate Jesus, not in all the outward events of his life, but in his inward attitude. “What would Jesus do?” is a valid question. Are there ways we can build up a person’s self-respect, as Jesus built up the tax collector’s? Are there ways that we can defend people who are being sneered at and criticized unfairly?

As we get better at embodying the character of Jesus, we become better evangelists of the living gospel. We become better at extending the invitation to membership in Jesus’ family.

Beyond the idea of studying Jesus to learn about God, and of emulating Jesus, I have one more piece of advice. That is: be inspired by Jesus. He said, “Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother” (Mark 3:35). So you can have the confidence of knowing that you are a brother or sister in Jesus’ family. You can communicate this to others, and feel the joy that comes when you have successfully encouraged someone else. As your understanding of Jesus and the Father grow, it can inspire your creativity.

We study Jesus, then, to learn about God, to follow Jesus in our deeds, and to be inspired in all aspects of our life. He gives us life and love more abundantly. If we see Jesus, we know about the Father, we emulate the divine way, and we are inspired.