

## A Storytelling Commentary on John 14:8-17

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The order of the parts of Jesus' final discourse in the lectionary is confusing. We are given the end of the discourse one week, and then moved back to an earlier part the next. I expect that the reason for this ordering is because of the theme of the Holy Spirit that is present in John 14:8-17 for Pentecost.

But this is at the expense of the overall experience of Jesus' speech. I have suggested that you tell the whole speech on the week it is first introduced (with John 13:31-35) so that people will have experienced it in its entirety before examining its parts, especially if they are received out of chronological order. Then they will have a context for each of the sections in the order that they are received. The notion that somehow people will understand because it will make sense theologically is wishful thinking.

In this commentary, I want to comment on the speech episode by episode. I suggest that you print the speech arranged in episodes so that you can follow my comments easily.

The first episode in this section of the discourse revolves around Philip's statement, "Show us the Father and we will be satisfied." Jesus' response is incredulity: "How can you ask to see the Father when I've been showing you the Father all the time? If I'm in the Father and the Father is in me then it isn't I who speak but the Father who dwells in me and does his works. So how can you say..." The logic moves from Philip's question, "Show us the Father and we will be satisfied," to the second episode, "How can you say 'Show us the Father'?"

The logic in this section of Jesus' speech is to say, "If you don't believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, and the words that I speak don't carry any authority for you, then at least believe that the Father is in the *works* and pay attention to the works." My hearing of this is that Jesus is somewhat impatient with Philip. This isn't just a statement of detached objectivity or puzzlement. This statement has an edge to it.

Such an edge would be typical of ancient teachers. Ancient teachers were not as solicitous of their students as modern teachers often are; they were often not all that nice. In fact, it was a tradition of ancient teaching that beating of students was fully appropriate in order to get their attention. The use of little whips or of yardsticks was a frequent pedagogical technique in ancient education. Many of the philosophers address their students in ways that are frequently very impatient and angry.

Thus, for there to be a tone of reprimand in Jesus' voice is just fine. It also lends some emotional interest to this long speech. If the whole speech is told in a detached and dispassionate way it becomes tedious. I'd recommend that you tell the story in a way that

has an edge to it. Jesus may be smiling, even as he mildly rebukes Philip, but it's not just dispassionate.

The next episode picks up on that same verbal thread: "Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?" The evidence for believing this is that "The words that I say I do not speak on my own but the Father who dwells in me does his works and he speaks through me, so believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me." The verbal thread at the beginning of the previous episode repeats again: "But if not the belief, then the works."

The fourth episode is organized around the theme of the works. A striking dimension of Jesus' words about his works is that those who believe will continue to do not only his works, but also even greater works than him. And there is a sense in which this is true of subsequent history.

The last three episodes (5-7) have distinctive themes. The fifth episode—"I will do whatever you ask in my name—is organized around the theme of asking: "Ask for what you want and I will do it," and "...ask in my name."

The sixth episode—"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father and he will give you another "Advocate" [Paraclete Holy Spirit] to be with you forever"—is the first explicit identification of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of John. Christ's Spirit will be continued by this Spirit of truth that will come after Jesus. The Spirit of truth will be the means of the experience of Christ's love and will be part of the continuity of the Father and the Son *in* the disciples and *with* the disciples.

The final episode names this Spirit as the Spirit of truth.

The gift of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of John is set in the context of Phillip's request, "Show us the Father and we will be satisfied." Jesus' answer is "You have already seen the Father and you will experience the Father in the Holy Spirit that God will send—who will continue my spirit in which you have known the Father."

In this discourse Jesus lays the foundation for the theology of the Holy Spirit. It is set in the context of a highly personal relationship that he describes between himself, the Father, and the Holy Spirit that will come and continue his work.