

# Sermons at St. Paul's

*A Wellspring of Spiritual Nourishment; A River of Service in  
Jesus' Name*

May 23, 2010, The Day of Pentecost  
The Reverend Nancy Burton Dilliplane

In the name of God, Holy One, Holy Three, *AMEN*

Philip said “Lord, show us the Father and we will be satisfied.” I love Philip. He is arguably my favorite disciple. I like Philip because, well, he’s a lot like me. He tries to be faithful, but more often than he would like, his faith turns out to be a little wobbly. Whenever Philip is around, you can count on him to be looking for a little more information, for someone to help him, for a little reassurance. Pentecost was made for wobbly disciples like Philip and me.

Philip plays a fairly prominent role in John’s gospel. In John’s telling of the story, Philip is the first disciple that Jesus calls. Andrew and his brother Peter, you may remember, seek Jesus out on their own and decide to follow him. But it is *Jesus* who chooses Philip and says to him “Follow me.” And what does Philip do? Does he leave everything and follow Jesus? Well, no. Not exactly. Before he can follow Jesus, Philip needs a little help. First, he has to go and grab his friend, Nathaniel. Once he’s got the support of a friend—a trusted companion for the journey, he’s ready to go. Philip the insecure.

The next time we next encounter Philip is by the Sea of Tiberius. The hour has grown late and the disciples are surrounded by a hungry crowd. Jesus turns to Philip and asks, “Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?” And Philip, who has by now spent days and weeks listening to his Rabbi teach, has seen water turned to wine, has seen a child brought back from the point of death, and seen a lame man walk replies in faith... “Uh, I don’t know. You tell me.” Philip the unsure.

Fast forward...Philip was front and center when that hungry crowd was miraculously fed, he’s seen a blind man receive his sight, he’s seen Lazarus raised from the dead. Yet when some Greeks approach him in Jerusalem, and say “Sir, we wish to see Jesus”, he can’t seem to lead them to Jesus by himself. Philip goes and gets Andrew, and together they approach Jesus. Philip the hesitant.

And then there is today’s Gospel story. Jesus and the disciples are in Jerusalem. The time has come for him to be glorified. Jesus knows what is coming even if the disciples do not. They are sharing a last meal together, and Jesus is telling them goodbye. “Where I am going, you cannot come,” he says. Then he washes his disciples’ feet, telling them that he is leaving them this example to follow when he is gone. He gives them, as well, a new commandment: Love one another as I have loved you.

Suddenly it dawns on the disciples that their teacher is really going to leave them, and they respond with confusion, fear and distress. Where are you going? We want to come with you! First Peter objects, then Thomas. Jesus tries to calm them down, but his words of comfort fall on deaf ears. “Do not let your hearts be troubled.” But they are troubled indeed. Jesus assures them that they are ready for what lies ahead. “If you know me, you will know my Father, also,” he says. “From now on you do know him and have seen him.” You are ready. But good old Philip expresses exactly what he’s feeling: “Lord, *show* us the Father, and we will be satisfied!” Philip, the unready.

Yes, Philip is my favorite disciple because he makes a place in the gospel story for disciples like me who are often insecure, unsure, hesitant and unready. I am grateful for Philip, the disciple who is brave enough to give voice to my own anxiety: WAIT! I’m NOT ready. Show me the Father, then I’ll be satisfied.

But you know something? Despite Jesus’ initial outburst of forehead slapping exasperation—“have I been with you all this time Philip, and still you do not know me? How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’ ”—Jesus takes Philip very seriously. Despite everything, Jesus still has great confidence in Philip. Even though Philip has needed reassurance every step of the way, Philip has nevertheless come with Jesus all the way to Jerusalem, and Philip is dedicated, even now, to trying to understand and follow him.

On their last night together, Jesus turned to Philip, the first disciple he called, honors his wobbly faith, and says “You also will do the works that I do, and in fact will do greater works than these.”

Jesus who knows that Philip has needed reassurance, and the support of others all along the way, honors Philip’s need for support, then promises him the Holy Spirit—another Advocate—to be with him, to shore up his wobbly faith, to be his companion in the way, to empower him to carry on Jesus’ ministry. Jesus promises Philip that when the time comes, he *will* be ready. “The Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.”

Yes, it is to the likes of Philip and me—the insecure, the unsure, the hesitant and the unready—that the day of Pentecost comes. The Holy Spirit comes to grant us the security, surety, boldness and readiness that we, on our own, will never have.

The Acts passage gives voice to the miraculousness power of the Holy Spirit, coming with a mighty wind, with tongues of fire, with visions, dreams, and the gift of tongues.

John’s gospel gives voice to something every bit as miraculous and powerful, if not as splashy: the wobbly faith of disciples like Philip is transformed by the Holy Spirit, falling as softly as a breath, and breathing into the disciples the power to continue Jesus’ work of forgiveness, light and life.

On the night of his leave-taking, Jesus entrusts the continuation of his ministry in the world to the likes of Philip. And to the likes of all of us. Jesus seems to be saying that

our seeing and knowing God is intimately bound up in *doing* acts of faith. “Believe 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.” Can it be that we come to less wobbly faith by doing Jesus’ work of reconciliation in the world?

In our acts of washing the feet of those whom the world holds valueless, and in having our own feet washed in return; in our proclaiming God’s unfailing love in a skeptical society; in our begging and claiming God’s mercy and forgiveness; and in our making a place at the table for those who have never had a seat; in our breaking bread and sharing wine, we *are* shown the Father. In doing the works that Jesus does, we become satisfied.

Despite our insecurity, uncertainty, hesitancy and unreadiness, we, like Philip are called to action. But we are not called to do it alone. Jesus takes seriously Philip’s wobbly faith that longs for certainty and seeks to make the journey with companions. As Jesus prepares to return to the Father, he promises Philip and the others that as they are sent out to do the work they’ve been given to do, they will not be asked to journey alone. They—we—will not be orphaned by Jesus’ leave-taking. We are promised the encouragement and comfort of the Holy Spirit, who will be our companion forever.

In just a few minutes ((at the 10:30 service)), Louise Grace Kopp will be brought to the waters of baptism. She and her parents, Ethan and Alison, will make some outrageous promises and statements of faith. They will renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God. They will turn to the Savior Jesus Christ and promise to follow and obey him. Sounds more like a Peter moment than a Philip moment!

But relax, Louise. Don’t worry Ethan and Alison, you won’t be asked to do this alone. We all will promise to do all in our power to support you. We’ll even come with you. Together we will recommit ourselves to the Father’s saving work:

- Sharing in the apostles teaching, fellowship the breaking of bread and prayer.
- Repenting of sin, and returning again and again to God
- Proclaiming the Good News of God’s love in Christ
- Seeking and serving Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves
- Working for justice, peace and the dignity of every human being

Nor will Louise, her family and friends, or this community of faith undertake these works alone. We do them only with God’s help.

The promised day of Pentecost has come, as it does not only every year, but with each baptism, and each time we remember our baptisms. With the oil of chrism we are marked with the sign of the cross and sealed with the Holy Spirit. The promised Advocate, the Spirit of truth has come to remind us of all that Jesus said, and to teach us everything we need to know to share in his risen life.

And as a Spirit-sealed and Christ-marked community, we come to see God more clearly by living our faith. As we rise from the waters of baptism and begin again to love and

serve one another, we discover the certain faith that we thought we needed to have in order to begin the journey in the first place. That's the true miracle of Pentecost.

So, come, Louise, Ethan, Alison. Come, you the baptized of Saint Paul's. Let us link arms with Philip, our unready companion. Let us trust that as we have seen God, we will continue to see God. Let us believe that we are not left orphaned, nor asked to make this journey of faith alone. We are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own forever. A mighty wind is blowing and there is a wide world out there that longs for us to show them the Father, that they, too may be satisfied. AMEN