

**John 14: 1-14**  
**Creekside COB**  
*April 20, 2008*

### **“Seeing All There Is to See”**

**For pastors, an important part of the learning curve in a new church is finding out which families are “inter-related.” If you are not careful, you could make a harmless, innocent remark about a member only to have the person you’re addressing take it the wrong way and report back to the person in question -- who just happens to be her sister.**

**In seminary, the term we used for these interconnected relationships was “family systems.” Learning to navigate Creekside’s system was a challenge and a half. LaVonne Myers and Mary Lou Martin are sisters. Betty Lamb and Roger Stutzman are brother and sister. Wylan Schultz is Myrtis Justiniano’s sister. A Gordon son, Mike, married a Kilmer granddaughter, Aundria, who is also a Weldy daughter. A Gordon brother, the uncle of the Gordon son, who married a Weldy daughter, married a Peffley. Are you with me so far? Curt Miller is the son of Norma Miller but neither is related to Myron Miller, and Paul Pletcher is NOT related to Bill Pletcher nor is Keith Hostetler related to Ned Hostetler.**

**Some connections are a breeze to make, especially between parents and children. Angi Marcin speaks with the same vocal inflection and intonations as her father, John Zerbe. Karen Gilliland Gabrielse looks like her mother, Marilee and talks like her father, Walt.**

**Mark Houser is a member at the Crest Manor Church of the Brethren. Mark was separated from his mother at birth and adopted. After college, he wanted to contact her, and his parents helped. Mark found that she was living on the west coast. One afternoon I stopped at the Housers’ for a short visit.**

A woman I had not met opened the door. I immediately knew she was Mark's mother. They looked alike. Their speech patterns were the same. They had the same laugh. They had the same mannerisms. It was a convincing case for genetics as a determining factor of who we are. Whether resemblances are due to genetics or environment, the parent/child bond is a strong one.

*"If you know me, you will know my Father also."* Jesus said this to the disciples. It comes from the place in John's gospel called, "the farewell discourses." Jesus was not one for short good-byes. There was a lot to tell the disciples, and he took over three chapters to do it.

*"Don't be troubled,"* he said. I doubt that they heard him. They were too frightened of events that were impinging upon them. What would become of Jesus, and what would become of them? *"Believe in God and me."* They believed. Their belief was a shaky belief in the face of the impending storm. *"I'll get your rooms ready. Where I am going, you'll be there, too...I'll be back to get you."* Jesus assured them. Thomas wasn't one to pretend to know what he didn't know. He asked Jesus, *"Where will you take us?"* *"We're going to my Father's house. You know the directions."* Thomas replied. **"NO WE DON'T!"**

Then Phillip joined the conversation. *"Show us the Father, and we'll be satisfied,"* he said. *"Show you the Father? Show you the Father!? Come on, Phil -- I've been with you three years, and you still don't know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the father."*

When you look at Jesus, you are looking at God. This was the core confession of the early Christian faith. Jesus wasn't like the local deities, only better. Jesus didn't seem like God. Jesus didn't resemble God. He didn't do a really good impersonation of God. He wasn't a spokesperson, envoy, or ambassador for God. The first Christians had the audacity to say, "Jesus IS God." In Jesus we see all we need to see of God. In Jesus, God walked among us, pitched his tent, gave us a good look into God's heart and in the process filled our hearts with his presence.

I remember the first time I saw God. I was just a kid at the time, and I was rather disappointed. My Grandma LeMay was into scrapbooks -- not like the DreamWorks productions that are so popular today. Her scrapbooks contained pictures and series from newspapers and magazines that interested her. She asked me if I wanted to see God. I remember the anticipation I felt as she turned the pages. "At last -- the Almighty." It was a photograph of a painting by an artist who saw some clouds that in his mind formed a momentary God look-alike. The painting was just a cheesy "old-man-in-a-robe-sitting-on-a-cloud" God. I still hadn't seen God, but at least I knew how God didn't look.

Let's suppose that God gave the world a good look at God's self. Let's suppose that no one died in the process, something, which the Hebrews believed, would certainly happen to the person who laid an eye on God. To *finally* see God -- the Almighty and omnipotent, the Creator of the celestial spheres, the Potentate of time -- that would be a great event, wouldn't it? It would finally blow the arguments of atheism to smithereens. The atheists would be dumbfounded -- along with half the people who show up for church on Sunday.

The existence or non-existence of God would be laid to rest. That would be a great thing... or would it? The mystery God would be peeled away. We would break the commandment about making idols. The Hebrews danced half-naked around a golden calf and we would sell commemorative T-shirts and collector's plates. Images of God would be plastered everywhere. Corporations would fight for "endorsement" deals. God's face would be turned into a multi-billion dollar merchandising enterprise. God would become our "trinket."

The awesome, unfathomable, timeless God would no longer be holy, transcendent, or bring us to our knees in awe. Instead of being an object of praise, he would be another object to manipulate for our own purposes.

A mystic named Rudolph Otto called God, "*the Wholly Other.*" He said that all constructs of God are desperately inadequate. Our language, our metaphors, our poetry, our religions are as

adequate in describing God as a house of cards in a tornado. "We see as much of God as a chicken that is still in the egg." 1 John 4:12 says, "No one has ever seen God." John 1: 18 likewise says, "No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known."

Our search for God and the longing to see God brings us to Jesus. "In him the presence of God was and is pleased to dwell." The issue for us is whether we will believe it and embrace it. Are we prepared to go out on a limb and live as though believing that *Jesus is God* and *God is Jesus* matters? It's a huge claim to say that Jesus' words are God's Word -- that everything he said and did was God's saying and doing -- that Jesus and God are indivisible -- that he came to us, walked with us, died for us, and has prepared a place for us as the surest sign that God loves us.

The issue is believing Jesus' response to Thomas' question: "How can we know the way?" Jesus told him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." It's a tough text for some of us. We're "turned off" by the arrogant, insensitive ways some people use Jesus' words to condemn others who do not believe as they do. Not wanting to be associated with "those" Christians, we go to the other extreme of believing that God always "keeps the light on" and never locks the door.

I've seen Sunday school classes in our church end in anger and tears over arguments about this verse. Some say, "Jesus is absolutely the only way to get to heaven and all other ways lead straight to hell." Others say, "Jesus is the very best way, but who are we to say there are no other legitimate paths to truth and ultimately to God?"

To shed light on the passage and not reinforce a zealous preconceptions of it we must note the "pulse of the passage." Earlier I said the disciples were anxious. Jesus' predictions were ominous. The religious leaders were conspiring against him. The disciples were scared and vulnerable. He was hinting that he would soon be leaving them. Knowing they were frightened he

comforted them. “Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God. Believe in me... I’m leaving to prepare a place for you.”

Jesus’ words were pastoral, comforting and reassuring. Why then do some Christians turn, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no one can come to the Father except through me,*” into a harsh exclusion? It doesn’t fit the spirit of the text or the spirit of Jesus. He isn’t trashing other beliefs or religions. The only religion Jesus criticized was his own! If he denounced anyone, it was the self-righteous Pharisees who were bad-mouthing people they thought were beneath them.

Why don’t we hear Jesus’ assuring Thomas and Phillip and the disciples and present company included, that the right path and the secure path is Jesus’ path? Why do we turn Jesus’ words into a warning instead of encouragement? Someone suggested this as the reason -- “Calling the roll is a lot easier than follow the leader.” “*When the roll is called up yonder I’ll be there. Sorry for the rest of you.*”

Dare I say there are Christians who arrogantly tell others, “Jesus is the only way to God,” who have themselves forgotten the way of Jesus? Jesus asks them what he asked Phillip -- “*Have I been with you all this time and you still don’t get it?*” Arrogance wasn’t Jesus’ way. He befriended those the Pharisees rejected. He didn’t paint them pictures of hell. He ate and drank with them. He healed them. He pointed to a better path -- a hard one where people learned to live and give sacrificially, carry crosses, wage peace, and love people into the Kingdom.

Bible scholar Sarah Breuer says, “I’d like to think that Christian’s dreams of the future are more like the book, *The End of Poverty than Left Behind*. Anxiety and fireworks usually sell better, though.”

In her memoir, *Traveling Mercies*, Anne Lamott writes about why she stays so close to her church. She and her son Sam missed church maybe ten times in twelve years. Her pastor,

**Veronica, often sang from the pulpit and told stories from her childhood. One was about the time when she was seven years old and her best friend got lost. The little girl ran up and down the streets of the big town where they lived, but couldn't find a single landmark. She was scared. Finally a policeman stopped to help. He put her in the passenger seat and they drove around until she finally saw her church. She pointed it out to the policeman, and told him firmly, *"You can let me out now. This is my church, and I can always find my way home from here."***

**Lamott writes, "And that is why I have stayed so close to mine-- because no matter how bad I am feeling, how lost or lonely or frightened, when I see the faces of the people at my church, when I hear their tawny voices, I can always find my way home."**

**Want to see God? Look further than Jesus. You need not blaze your own trail. If you know him, you will know the Father also. Stick with him and you'll find your way home.**