

“Seeing the Father”
John 10:22-30

“The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.”

As a culture, we will use that expression to speak of how children often reflect their parents; of how offspring can demonstrate in mannerism or vocational choice or their personality similarities to the ones who gave life or raised them. Many of us have seen that reality when we have known more than one generation of the same family and can smile or look on with wonder at shared traits between parent and child. Yet when it happens to us, when we see a younger version of ourselves mimic our behavior, it can be jarring.

My father used to tell the story of a day he and one of my older brothers were riding in a car. My sibling was about eight years old, yet he had already observed that while driving my father liked to talk to other drivers. I don’t mean he would call them on a hands-free cell phone as that wasn’t an option then. Nor am I suggesting he would roll down his window at traffic signals and engage in casual conversation about road conditions. Even so, my father would talk to other drivers with great conviction from the safety of his vehicle, expressing an opinion about the quality and skill of their efforts. As an aside, my children could tell you of similar attributes in their father as I might in speaking of them, but this story isn’t about any of us!

Instead, as my father and brother were proceeding that day, another vehicle cut them off or zoomed past them or in some other way violated Dad-approved behavior. In that moment, my father said nothing audibly, but my second grade sibling glared at the other driver and muttered “You crazy, teen-age idiot.” While I’m sure my father would like to have added that hearing his own words emerge from an eight-year old cured him of uttering similar responses in the future, in all likelihood it simply reminded him of how his actions could live on in the next generation.

While such a reality can be appropriately chilling for any of us with a little one in our car or under our roof, the Biblical text we just read speaks of how the similarity between another parent and child offers a gift to us. It comes when Jesus declares, “I and the Father are one.”

It describes a day when Jewish religious leaders approach Jesus while he was teaching on the Temple Mount. John tell us that it was during the Festival of the Dedication, an event better known to us as Hanukkah, when Jewish officials come to Jesus with a demand. “How long will you keep us in suspense?” they ask. “If you are the Messiah tell us plainly.”

To place that statement in context, it’s helpful to know that in his ministry to that point, Jesus had already caused some to wonder if he was the long-promised savior. His teachings had brought great insight and power. Witnesses to healings and the feeding of a large crowd with a few fish and loaves of bread—all at Jesus’ hand--caused accounts about him to spread, too. Then, in the verses just prior to our account, Jesus had declared, “I am the Good Shepherd.” To Jewish ears, those words were akin to calling himself the Messiah as God was understood to be the only true shepherd of Israel. After those events, John reports that the Jews were divided again over what Jesus had said and that a fierce debate erupted among them over his identity.

Thus, in our passage, some of those leaders come to Jesus and say, “How long will you keep us in suspense?” In its literal sense, their question means, “How long will you take away our breath?” or even “How long will you continue to annoy us?” Those religious officials are not posing a philosophical question, but instead want a direct answer, either to settle the debate or give them cause to arrest him or both. So they ask “Are you the messiah or not?”

In response, Jesus says, “I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name testify to me, but you do not believe.” He goes on and adds to the sheep

imagery of the earlier day by adding that the reason they do not believe is because they are not one of his sheep, that the members of his flock will receive eternal life and that no one can snatch one of his own out of his hand. He then concludes, "The Father and I are one."

That final statement will become the key verse in a debate arising in the 4th century over the nature of Jesus. Was he only a good man whom God had adopted because of his faithfulness or was he truly the Son of God? Those questions led to two church councils that ultimately resulted in what we know as the Nicene Creed. We are using as our Affirmation of Faith this morning the key phrases from the document that address that question. The same Biblical line from Jesus stands at the literal halfway point of this gospel, suggesting it is a kind of hinge, even the central message of John's version of the Good News; the key to understanding God. In it, Jesus is making clear to his challengers that in word and deed he fully represents his father.

During World War II, John Eisenhower was an aide on the staff of his father, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces. One day the general gave his son a message to deliver to a colonel on the front line. When the younger Eisenhower found the officer he announced, "My dad says to watch your right flank." "Really," replied the puzzled officer. "And what does your mommy say?" (Lenehan, Arthur F., editor. *The Best of Bits & Pieces*. Fairfield, NJ: The Economics Press, 1994, p. 13)

Jesus had learned that only passing on the words of his father was unconvincing for some, too, so in response to a demand to clear up the mystery, he said, "I have told you, and you do not believe," and added, "The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me....the Father and I are one." In other words, that to see his unique connection to God, they are to pay close attention to what he is doing. "Jesus is not saying that he and God are one person nor even of one nature and essence. Rather, he is saying that he and God are united in the work they do." (O'Day, Gail *The New Interpreter's Bible: Volume IX*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995, p. 677)

That similarity between Father and Son is to be the basis for our lives, too. To be sure, none of us is a biological child of the God, but all of us have been created in his image. All who have professed the faith have taken on the name of Christian, too, which among other things means that just as Jesus reflects the nature and will of God so are we to strive in all moments to do the same. Equally certain is that none of us will do that perfectly, but such human frailty does not mean we are to stop seeking to demonstrate in all moments the will of the Father.

Such a response has always been difficult, but it remains our calling in the fullness of life. For what is to be our best response as Christians to what appears to be the likely overturning of *Roe v. Wade*? How are we best to stand with children who are still being bullied because of their looks or demeanor or gender identity? How are we to respond best in another election cycle where the accusations and vitriol continue to grow? In other words, how are we to demonstrate the faith that we have professed in the fullness of life and in the world beyond these walls?

Part of our response surely comes with words. Words can still bring comfort and hope, clarity and peace. We should never underestimate what our words can accomplish and grow in using them wisely. Yet on a day when challenged as to his identity, Jesus pointed to his deeds.

One minister put it this way. "Does one want to know God the Father? Look at Jesus. Does one want to know the Father's will? Listen to Jesus. Does one want to know the Father's love? Look where Jesus goes. Does one want to live? Walk with Jesus." (Bruner, Dale, *The Gospel of John*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmann Publishing Company, 2012, p. 639)

Thus on this day, Jesus says that if we want to see the Father, look more closely at the Son. Calling upon us to grow in learning what Scripture has to say about his ministry and witness. To keep modeling what we discover so that it will ever more fully shape our words and

actions in an ever-more contentious world. Discovering in such a response not only the ways that the Son reflects the Father, but hopefully finding in ourselves a growing family resemblance, too.