

## First Baptist Church of Augusta

John 14:8-9

*PainFULL: Disappointment*

October 26, 2008

8 Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." 9 Jesus 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'?" (John 14:8-9)

We imagine this man called Jesus from many different perspectives: Jesus, the rabbinic teacher, full of wisdom and knowledge; Jesus, the healer, full of mercy and compassion; Jesus, the mighty worker of miracles, master of nature; Jesus, the Son of God, and the Son of Humanity, the fullness of both. There are other pictures of Jesus, too, that are not so glamorous. For stated purposes this morning, the picture of Jesus I hold before you, is that of a disappointed man. Take this passage in John that was read earlier in the service. Jesus has given sign after sign that the kingdom, the movement, the new order of God was upon them, and still the disciples just don't get it. Philip blurts out what the rest are thinking. "Jesus, show us some evidence, some proof, some startling manifestation of God and then we will be satisfied." In what must have been exasperated and resigned tones, Jesus heaves a sigh and says, "Have I been with you *all this time*, Philip, and you still do not know?"

### Disappointed with Others

We all know the pain of disappointments. There are many. People will let you down every time. M. Scott Peck, starts out his best-selling book, *The Road Less Traveled*, with a three word sentence: life is difficult. It certainly is, because life is filled with people who will disappoint you. We have all had a friend, spouse, a trusted colleague whom you hold in great affection, make a slighting remark or is not there in a time of need. Indeed, at some point, every relationship will have its disappointments, including family, friends, and yes, your pastor. If I have not done so already – but I suspect I have – I will disappoint you.

There is a story in Luke 17, where Jesus heals ten lepers – ten! – but only one turns around to give thanks. Disappointing. And then, there is his family, including his mother, who thought he had lost his mind, and they came to take him away. That's right, it is all there in the Book! (Mark 3:21) Particularly, in the gospel of Mark, we read of Jesus' own frustration with his disciples, because they just failed to get Jesus. In spite of their presence at healings, exorcisms, and teachings, Jesus more than once would look upon his hand-picked lot and say, "*Do you not understand?*" "Have I been with you *all this time*, Philip, and you still do not know?"

Yes, we are in good company when others let us down, for this was Jesus' experience, too.

### Disappointed with Self

Disappointments are *pain-full*. Not only do others disappoint us, but we disappoint ourselves. There is the mother, who looks upon her son, now in drug-rehab, and although she can manage her disappointment in her son, it is the aching pain she feels of her own failure as a parent of which she suffers. Our marriages, our studies in school, our careers, are laced with disappointments in ourselves.

I wonder if Jesus was ever disappointed with himself. I think he was. To be misunderstood, not only by the crowds, the religious establishment, and his closest disciples and family, must have been disappointing. The privation, humiliation, and silence on the cross, all nod to inexpressible sorrow in how it was turning out. Was it supposed to be this way?

## **Disappointing God**

Do we even have time to deal with the disappointments we feel God has with us? Some come to church, crawling into the sanctuary holding on for dear life to the pew in front of them, because they know how much they have let God down, and now the preacher is going to bring all of that out. Don't get me wrong, there are plenty of things we ought to feel guilt over. I am not about to let us off the hook that easily. Still, the burden of letting God down can be a heavy load. Many bear this weight as the only enduring experience they have with God, that is, disappointing God.

*What about being...*

### **Disappointed with God**

Have you ever been disappointed with God? Believe it or not, it is okay to admit it. We all have been let down by our expectations of God. Who has not lifted a prayer for healing or some other divine intervention, only to be met by the blunt of silence? Jesus was described in Luke, as sweating drops of blood in his anguished prayer to God, that the cup, that is the impending execution, pass over him. Moments later, he was met by an angry mob, arrested, and, well, you know the rest. My encouraging word to all of us, who have been disappointed with God, is that you are not alone.

Some estimate, that about a third of the Psalms deal with a tone of disappointment with God. There are the laments of how the wicked seem to prosper and how the righteous suffer. "I thought we had this deal God – what is going on? Are you even listening?"

### **Disappointed with Jesus**

Jesus, too, was the source of big disappointments. He really does not meet anyone's expectations – not the religious folk, not the political establishment, and not his followers, including the twelve disciples.

To those who wanted a political savior, Jesus disappoints, because his kingdom is not of this world.

To those who wanted a social reformer, Jesus disappoints, because even in his day, for every lame, blind, or demon-filled life he healed, there were scores of others left behind.

To those who wanted a warrior, like King David of old, Jesus disappoints, because he comes as the Prince of Peace.

To those who wanted a savior of power and position Jesus disappoints and says, "*Blessed are the poor,*" and entered Jerusalem on a donkey for goodness sake.

How does it all end up with Jesus? The disappointing cross, where all the disciples, save one, abandon and hide. Henri Nouwen writes: "[God] spread out for the whole world to see the injustice of this world. The cross in one minute showed what kind of world we have—a world of violence, a world of cruelty, a world of injustice, and what kind of God we have, a God of sacrificial love who gives Himself for us."

I wish I could give to you, dear family, one gospel lesson that encapsulates all these disappointments, but instead, all I can do is point to this book in its entirety and say, "Here contains a catalogue of disappointments, scattered debris, and casualties of failure and failed expectations."

### **Disappointments Remind us of Our Humanity and not Our Divinity**

What I can say is that disappointments have their place. They remind us of our humanity and not our divinity. Humanity is our experience. Divinity belongs to God. I am not saying disappointments are innately good and we should strive to be disappointed. That would be foolish. We can, however, learn from our disappointments and be redirected. All disappointments can birth authenticity in our relationships with one another and with God. Disappointments can serve as a foothold to getting real. And, if there is one thing the church needs to be, it is to be real.

The One, whose name the Jews would not even speak, is the One who dismisses our standards of success, our measures of progress, our illusions of worth. Friends, this is Good News, because finally we are liberated from the idols that ultimately disappoint. While all of this can be mighty pain-*full*, it can bring us to generative spaces for growth.

Our bowing down, our prostration is to the One Lord, One Savior. We come making this confession that Jesus is Savior and Lord. The savior part of our confession we readily get, for we want God to do just that, to save. Save us from our sin, save us from condemnation, save us from others, and save us on the day of judgment. We get, I contend, the savior part of the confession.

The oldest confession, however, uttered by followers of Jesus, is to call Jesus Lord. Tonight, we will have eight persons for baptism that have made decisions this past month, and for each one I will ask: *what is your confession of faith?* Chest high in the baptismal waters, each is invited to respond with the ancient but challenging words: *Jesus is Lord.*

To speak of Jesus as Lord, which we all do at our baptism, is to announce Good News, that even the bitterest of disappointments will not disable, compromise, or obstruct the work of God. To say, Jesus is Lord, is to confess that redemption is by the hand of God and not the hand of persons, principalities, philosophies or politics. Yes, that is exactly what we need to hear, as we approach a great day in America, when we cast our vote for the next president, because no matter who wins on November the 4<sup>th</sup>, people are going to be disappointed. Some will openly express their disappointment that the world, particularly our nation, is destined to fail, because of who is elected. I have news for you: no matter who wins, we will ultimately fail, because the one who occupies the executive seat of this nation is not our savior, is not our Lord.

Who is your Savior and Lord? Disappointments are bound to happen if we hold tightly to the salvation of God but neglect the lordship of God. Jesus did not say, to follow me, when it is convenient to you, when it works to your benefit or when it is advantageous or feels good. Jesus said to follow him. And it will take us to strangers and prisons and poor houses; it will take us to places and people we never thought of meeting; it will take us to the shadowed valley of disappointments, but all that is okay, as long as we remember the beloved of words in 1 John:

*Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome...because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.* (KJV 1 John 4:4)

Disappointments are not the final word of the Gospel. In this passage of John 14, Jesus says to his disciples who are disappointed and disappointing: “...*truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do...*”

Disappointments become the unwitting invitation to draw ever close to God in every relationship and re-engage Jesus’ call for us to follow him as Savior and Lord.