

Do We Know Jesus?

May 1, 2021 Scott Gunn

*Jesus said to [Philip], “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me?”—
John 14:9*

It’s impossible to know the tone of some of Jesus’s comments. When he asks Philip how it’s possible that he doesn’t know his Lord yet, we can’t be certain if Jesus is angry or sad or surprised or compassionate. Perhaps he’s all those things.

Part of me understands Philip’s question. After all, the one consistent trait of Jesus’s disciples is that they often don’t seem to “get it.” I want to root for this question, because it makes me feel better about all the times I don’t get it.

But then I’m also left to wonder: how is it that Philip doesn’t know Jesus and his Father in heaven by now? They’ve been through so much together. Wasn’t Philip paying attention? No wonder Jesus is frustrated!

If I’m honest with myself, I think the second way of seeing this encounter rings true more than the first. At some point the disciples—both in Jesus’s time and in ours today—have to take some responsibility. Disciples who have spent time with Jesus should know him and his Father. It would be convenient for me if I could convince myself that since I wasn’t alive in first-century Judea, I’m off the hook here. But I have met Jesus. I know him in the sacraments. I know him in the scriptures. I know him in his church. I know him in his abiding presence.

I haven’t seen the kind of miracles that Philip and his companions saw. But I have seen the work of Jesus Christ, make no mistake about it. I have seen broken relationships made whole. I have seen healing of body and mind. I have seen people who once were lost suddenly discover they are found. I have seen the way people are nourished in the sacraments. I have seen the effects of Jesus’s truth-telling as the scriptures are proclaimed.

You’d think it would have sunk in by now. Maybe Philip thought the same thing. And if I take a witheringly honest look at my life, it’s not hard for me to imagine Jesus saying to me, “Have I been with you all this time, and you still do not know me?”

In the Bible study I lead, we were recently talking about how God can love us and also be disappointed in us. We tend to focus on God’s love for us and all people, and that’s the right emphasis. If we heed the many warnings in the scriptures about spiritual pride, we will also consider the ways we might disappoint God. And in those moments, we do well to commit to trying again. Even at the eleventh hour, there is always time to repent. Let us seek to know the Father and Son, and may our lives show forth what we believe.