

SAINTS PHILIP AND JAMES  
ST NICOLAS'S CHURCH, ABINGDON

3 May 2026



Acts 7.44-6 / John 14.1-14

‘Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.”’

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit – *Amen*

POOR PHILIP HAS NOT BEEN PAYING CLOSE ATTENTION. Those of us who lecture, to schoolchildren or to undergraduates or to any general audience, know the sort: keen to *know* the answers, but not fully *tuned in* to the lesson. Perhaps Philip experienced what we now call Attention Deficit Disorder, though that may be an unfair retrospective diagnosis, since *Thomas* likewise seems to have been missing the point throughout the gospel, and the *crowds* as well, and *Peter*, and even the Beloved Disciple. Jesus strides majestically through John’s Gospel healing and feeding and preaching and commanding the natural elements, and everyone seems to want *more* from him. ‘No, but *show us...*’ ‘What *is* the way?’ ‘Where *are* you going, that we can’t go with you?’ And Jesus asks only one thing of them: ‘Believe me.’

A certain sort of reader grabs onto that admonition with both hands: ‘Believe and be saved.’ But whatever ‘believe’ means in this context, it *can’t* refer to holding to the correct creeds and definitions. We wouldn’t *have* correct creeds and definitions for 250 years or more after the scene that John tells us about, and although Jesus states a number of lapidary formulations in the gospel, such as this morning’s ‘I am in the Father and the Father is in me,’ and ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life,’ you will note that these are neither self-explanatory nor even especially clear. ‘Define your terms!’ I would say, if

Jesus were submitting a tutorial essay to me — to which Jesus might say, ‘I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.’

Because *all through* John’s Gospel, all the characters have struggled to understand who Jesus was and what he was up to. His friends, his opponents, the Romans, the Judeans, the Twelve, Pontius Pilate, *everyone* puts their own assumptions in the way of just *listening* to Jesus. All he asks of anyone is that they *trust* him, and not just because he *said* so; he *backed up* his teaching with *work*. Jesus didn’t suppose there was anything wrong with ‘works righteousness’ just because it had the word ‘works’ in it — he explained all the time that *trusting* him meant *doing stuff*, doing the kinds of thing that he did. ‘The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. *Trust* me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then trust me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who trusts me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these...’.

Now, if we think, ‘Well, that’s a bit of an overstatement, isn’t it? We can’t just lay hands on a blind man and restore his sight’, then we might at *least* do what we *can*. We *can* feed people, we *can* contribute to their medical and spiritual well-being, we *can* bring lost sheep into the fold of which Christ is the Good Shepherd. And when each of us does what they can, when our works complement one another, the knock-on effects stretch outward. Pretty soon, we are doing greater things than Jesus not because we have spiritual superpowers, but because we *outnumber* him, and because we find more and more people who *need* our support, and we help them.

That’s no pernicious ‘works-righteousness’; that’s the proof of the Gospel in which Jesus implores people to *trust him* because of the works themselves. That’s Jesus’s answer to St Philip: ‘Come with me to the Food Bank, to the Old Station House, to the J.R. or to Abingdon Bridge, to see the great things that my disciples are doing. So you want to see the Father? Let me display him to you in the works of my faithful people.’ As we minister to our

town, our country, our world, we show the world Jesus at work among us;  
and thus they, and St Philip, see the Father — and are satisfied.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit —

*Amen*