Since it’s my birthday, we might as well talk about Philip – the Apostle not me. So hopefully no one was looking for an extended narrative illuminating my young carefree days roaming the streets of northwest Fresno and learning the intricacies of raisin production. What I want to look at instead, besides the fact that Philip is spelled with one “L” in the Bible, is the story we have in our Gospel lesson. It has been a couple of minutes so let me refresh you with what it said. We read this, “Philip said to him, ‘Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.’ 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’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works.’”

What I really want to focus on in this passage is not necessarily Jesus’ answer to Philip (even though we will get to that) but rather the world view behind the demand that Philip expresses. The demand is that in order for him to be satisfied he needs Jesus to show him the father. It is not quite explained what Philip means by “satisfied” but I think it is safe to say he is looking for one more thing in order to fully believe that Jesus is who he says he is. I do not want to be to hard on Philip, not just because he has an awesome name, but rather because the sentiment he expresses is a very common one – we often seem to need just need one more thing and then all will be well. The problem, however, is when one more thing comes we find a reason why it is still not what we need. And this is not just in terms of being a Christian but in many other things.

I remember years ago, back in Fresno we had not had rain for a while, which is kind of the norm in California, except when it isn’t like this year. Anyway, the farmers had been complaining about this lack of rain causing problems with their crops. Well, one day it rained and there was an article in the paper the next day about it (obviously rain is a much bigger deal in California than in Wisconsin). They interviewed a farmer, who you would have thought would have been ecstatic, but you would be wrong. The farmer said that while there had been rain it had come at the wrong time of day, in the wrong part of the month and did not last the right amount of time. The one more thing, when it actually came, simply did not meet the criteria of the one more thing for which he had asked. And I think that is much the reason for Jesus’ answer to Philip. He doesn’t apologize and ask how he could have been so obtuse and not shown Philip the father. Rather he says, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me?” Jesus points out that the problem is not a need for one more bit of evidence from “out there” but rather has to do with Philip and his lack of belief. In other words, the one more thing was not going to change Philip, rather Philip needed to change something inside of himself.

Here is a story that hopefully gets at what I am talking about. Last December, while meeting with our base commander in Kuwait he told me about a conversation he had had with some pilots. They told him that they wished that the chapel would have services on Saturday because getting to church on Sunday could be very difficult in their profession. I told the commander that I would be more than happy to schedule a service on Saturday. To make this work I spoke with the Operations Commander (that is the commander who is over the pilots) and found out what time would be good for this new Saturday service. We determined a time and then, to make sure everyone knew, we put out some advertising. The next Saturday, at the appointed time, I sat with another chaplain in the chapel waiting for pilots to show up for the service they had requested. After thirty minutes we decided that no one was coming. We tried again the following week and again, no one showed up. This went on for five weeks until we concluded that no one really wanted the service. Like Philip this morning there were people who would do something if they just had one more thing. In this case it was a special pilot service on Saturdays, but when that special service was offered, they found a reason to not attend in the same way they had found a reason not to attend on Sundays. The problem it seems was not a lack of opportunities, but rather a lack of motivation. I bring this story up not to indict the pilots, but rather as a warning to all of us about wanting to make our internal problems into external problems – like Philip blaming his lack of faith on Jesus’ teaching methods.

Philip and the pilots claimed that they just needed one more thing and then they would be the best Christians ever, but as Jesus points out they already had everything they needed. One more thing was not going to solve anything if there was not an internal change. And so, the question for us is what are our one more things? For myself I can think of quite a few. As an introvert I am generally convinced that my spiritual life will be better once I have less distraction. That is once it is quiet, I will somehow transform into St. Francis of Assisi. Another example of “one more thing” that clergy are susceptible to is pining for church growth. Clergy seem to seldom be satisfied with the size of the church they currently have but are certain that they will be satisfied at some point in the future when they get the parish, they believe they should have. But I think in these cases, and in many others, what the problem seems to be is we refuse to appreciate what we have and instead insist that we need something else in order to be satisfied and become our best Christian selves. But as Jesus says in Matthew in the parable of the Talents, “you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much.” God seems to want us to appreciate what we have now before he is looking to give us anything more.

And in many ways, we could call what God is looking for by another name. We could call it gratitude. That is being thankful for what we have been given and not being upset about what we have not been given. Philip spent a large amount of time in the presence of Jesus, but rather than being grateful for such a privileged position he could only think about what he had not yet been given. I generally don’t like to argue that there is one item that will fix all our problems, but I do think gratitude would go a long way toward making our society a better place. We seem to all be focused on what our society doesn’t have rather than being thankful to God for what it does have. I was reading a book the other day about the Battle of Actium which pitted Octavian (who would later be Emperor Augustus) versus Marc Antony and Cleopatra. I don’t want to go into the details about the battle but one thing that struck me was how hard it was for Octavian to get from Rome to Actium, a distance of about 550 miles. At the time Octavian was the most powerful person in the Western Roman Empire and it took him weeks to get there. Nowadays most anyone with a $100 could make the journey in a half a day. Octavian I am sure would have been grateful for the time savings. And yet we live in such a world, a world that the ancients would marvel at, and are unhappy about it. But counting our blessings and not demanding one more thing could go a long way towards ensuring that we are God’s own this day and forevermore.