

St. David's Presbyterian Church  
St. John's, NL  
"Known and Knowing"  
Dr. J. Dent

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Proper 11

How much do we know? We think we know a lot, most of us. We have reports about the weather, about the stock market, about those who have passed away, about those who done great and honourable acts, and those who done despicable things. Many of us have a specific line of work where we have specialized in some area, some trade, some profession, some academic or pragmatic expertise. We know something that others do not. Some of us here in this congregation are national and international leaders in certain areas of learning and knowledge.

How much do we know? Some of us have raised several children, have looked after grandchildren, and even great-grandchildren. We have taken care of spouses, of parents and brothers and sisters, and extended family members. We have experienced many things, wonderful and painful, powerful, delightful and disgusting.

How much do we know? I've personally pursued education a long time in post-secondary institutions. I earned a Bachelor of Arts in a double major of Linguistics and Religious Studies. I did a Master of Theological Studies with emphases on the Old Testament and Christianity and Literature. I did a second Masters in Theology with emphases on Pastoral Theology and Quebec Church History. I did another diploma in denominational studies and also spent a good number of hours in Clinical Pastoral Education. I completed my PhD in Religious Studies on the subject of dreams, and how the therapeutic community helps the individual interpret the symbols of dreams in parallel to how the Christian community helps the individual interpret the symbols and stories of Scripture. I also did a two year course in lay counseling, both personal and marital.

How much do I know? In the end, I'd like to think I know a great deal. But I also know I have much yet to learn. And I've also come to believe that it is even more important to know how much I'm known, even more than how much I know.

In a month's time, I'll be fifty. My mother is coming from California and she will be 86. I was born on her birthday. I was supposed to be born on my father's birthday, September 10, but was born August 22, on my mother's.

I say all this not so much to focus on me, but to lead us all back to what Jacob learned while his head was on the hard pillow of a rock in a desert-like place near Beersheba, "the well of the seven (lambs), or the oath". He had a dream, not unlike dreams that you and I might have. He was met by God in the dream, and was given the promise that he is known much better than he knows about his life. He was worried that his brother, who was very angry with him for stealing his eldest son's blessing, might catch up with him and kill him. His future was uncertain, and he had no idea that he would fall in love, work for seven years to marry her and be deceived and work another seven years for a relative, just to secure a family and a future. He had no idea what his future held.

And neither do we. All we know is what God tells us by way of the promise that He quietly whispers in each of ears. This is the promise God gives to every one of us who gives ourselves completely to God. The promise is God's presence and blessing through the offspring of Jacob, who is Jesus. It is the promise of being part of the house of God, the Bethel (which means "the house of God" in Hebrew, the place where God wants to meet us, right here, right now. This is the place and every place we open ourselves to Jesus, we experience the ladder between heaven and earth, and the angels, the messengers of God coming to us, speaking to us, even when we don't have ears to hear or eyes to comprehend.

God constantly is broadcasting to us his message. The message is that of Psalm 139 where the Psalmist sings a song about How Much we are Known. That's what I'd call it. Nowhere else in Scripture (except perhaps Job) do we find the kind of language used that God knows us, every thought, every word, every deed. If we were to live the truth of that reality, we would be much better people. If we were to ask God, what he thinks about our work, our relationships, our future, our decisions, our holiday plans, our family questions, our employment decisions, our friendships, our hobbies, you name it. If we were to talk to God more about these things, we might find the most marvelous breakthroughs in our lives, personal, professional and otherwise.

Prayer is a key to unlocking many of the mysteries that we face. Because it is in being known that we begin to know what we need to know. The short prayer at the end of Psalm 139 is a good one to memorize. I open my thoughts and my heart to you, O God, show me what is right in them, and what is not, and lead me in your way. Search me, O God, and know my heart, test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139: 23-24, NIV, TNIV)

In that moment we open ourselves to being corrected by the Author of Life. In that moment we ask God to speak into our lives and to help us think and live in a way which gives glory to God, which in turn is the best way to live in relation to every human being around me.

In Romans, and particularly in chapter 8, Paul talks about this as the conflict between living according to the Spirit or living according to the sinful nature, or the "flesh." We have a choice. Even though we have made Christian commitments and solemn church vows, nevertheless we have a daily choice to renew our determination to live by God's Holy Spirit, and be and do what He wants to, or to live by our own way and spirit or some other spirit. We can choose to ignore what God says to us about living and loving, about making a difference in the lives around us for God, or we can say "yes" to God.

We have a choice to be the weeds in the world in which we live, which chokes out life and hope and direction, or we can be the wheat. Jesus taught that there would always be a mixture in this world. I suspect that mixture exists both in the community and in the church. We'll never really know everyone's hearts and commitments the way God does. God sees those who truly want to honor God and all His ways, and those that do church or community service for other reasons.

In the end, God will divide the weeds from the wheat. Meanwhile, we proclaim that it is by giving yourself to Christ, by loving and learning from Jesus, that we die to ourselves and give the grain of our existence back to God. It is in the practical acts of loving, as well as the words of trusting God in true faith, that we find again how much more important it is to be known as to know.

As we know we are known, we know we know what is most important.

Seek to be known by God, consciously, intentionally, daily. He does know us so this part of the relationship is for us. And I cannot promise there will be no pain or difficulty in this being known. Many of us face fear and anxieties that we never want to face again. But in these deepest places of life, God wants to establish his richest sense of love. In the places of loss, hurt, pain and grief, God wants to establish his deepest sense of peace and belonging.

Every individual here knows about the places in their lives that they have never shared. Everyone here has the secret places, the private places, the painful and wonderful places which makes each of us uniquely who we are. Invite God into each of these places. And if we can help, if the church can help, just ask.

Perhaps we have been a part of the problem. Help us help you forgive us, by asking. There is great freedom in forgiveness. Remember the words that we say every week, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors" or "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." There is a great freedom in forgiving.

During some of the quiet times of the summer, make sure you take time away from the noise and listen to what God is speaking to you about yourself and others. Ask God what makes you uniquely you. Invite God into the deepest parts of who you are. Write down what you sense God is saying.

Be known this Summer, and know the knowledge of the most important kind.

Let us pray.