

Seventh Sunday of Easter

Texts: John 17:20-26; Acts 1:12-26; Rev 22:1-6, 12-20

May 29, 2022

Simply Knowing God

The great Albert Einstein once said that you don't really know something; you don't really understand something *unless you can explain it in a plain and simple way to your grandmother*. Now, this makes sense when the subject is something like quantum physics or calculus or biochemistry, *but what about when the subject is God?* Do you know God? I don't mean do you have mere knowledge of God; i.e., do you know *about* God. Even Atheists, Satanists, and all types of people in our culture who openly despise God and hate God know *about* God. Do you know God? Do you understand God? Can you explain God in a plain and simple way to your grandma, your children, your grandchildren, or anyone for that matter?

Well... maybe we need to break these questions down a bit. Can we know God? Is that even possible? **Absolutely**. In the Biblical, intimate sense of the word, to know God is to trust in God; to believe God and have faith in Him and His promises. The apostle John states in his first epistle, "*We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of Truth and the spirit of falsehood. Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.*" Basically, when we love one another just as Jesus has loved us, we are showing/proving that we know God. We know His love. We understand. Conversely, those who despise God's Word of Truth; those who claim to know/love God and yet refuse to listen to His Word *really don't know Him at all*. They may boast of knowing God. They may boast of loving God, *but it's a spirit of falsehood. It's a demonic spirit of lies, and the fruits they bear prove it*. They don't know God. They may know the god of their own making. They may know the god they've fashioned in their own image and likeness; i.e., the god that approves of their wicked ways, but they don't know the one true God; the eternal God; the just and loving God of Holy Scripture.

Now... just because we can know God through faith doesn't mean that we'll ever *fully understand* God. That's a whole different animal! And understand: I'm not talking about things like the concept of eternity or the doctrine of the Trinity; things that we will **NEVER** understand; things that God doesn't give us to understand. What was God doing before He created the heavens and the earth? How is God one God, and yet three persons? How does that work? *I don't know. I can't explain it*. Not even the smartest theological minds in all of history can explain it. The best they can do is give some poor examples. "*It's like a shamrock. It's like a triangle.*" No, it's not. But you don't need to know how eternity works in order to have eternal life (thank God!). You don't need to know how the Trinity works in order to have eternal life. If you did, God would tell you. He tells you everything you **need** to know in order to be saved.

Look to this cross. This is what I'm talking about when I say that you will never be able to fully know/understand God. Here is the perfect, sinless, innocent Son of God Himself. This is how much God loves you! **Why?!** I know you. And even if I don't know all about you and all the sinful skeletons in your closet, **I know me.** Why would God waste His time on a moron like me? I know my sinful reality, and I know what my sin deserves. I know that not only do I deserve to be on that cross, I deserve way worse. I may not be able to comprehend eternity, but I know that I deserve only present and eternal punishment for my sin. Why in the world would God do **any** of this for me, let alone **ALL** this for me? I know what I would do if I were in charge, **and it ain't what this God does! What kind of God does this?!** I don't know. I don't understand it. I can't explain it.

And that's just it. The mercy, the grace, the love of God is truly incomprehensible. You cannot comprehend it, **and even in heaven you won't be able to comprehend it.** For the rest of eternity you'll be in awe of it. You'll rejoice and praise Him for His mercy, grace, and love, but you will **NEVER** be able to truly comprehend it. It is truly unknowable... **at least in all it's fullness and glory.** You will never be able to wrap your brain around the love that God has for you and for all children of Adam, even those folks who absolutely don't deserve it.

And that brings up a couple of points we need to address before we call it a day. If you pay attention to the First Reading for today (Acts 1:12-26), you find that the apostles make it a point of filling the apostolic vacancy left by Judas. The apostolic band is down a guy, leaving them with only eleven men. **Eleven won't do!** Why? Because the Good News of Christ crucified is for **ALL** people; all twelve tribes and nations of God's people. No one is to be left out.

How does one come to know God? How does one come to know this incomprehensible love that God has for us and for all people? **Evangelism. Mission. Speaking and sharing the Word.** St. Paul tells us, “*Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*’ How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? (You can't believe or call on Him if you don't know Him.) And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? [...] So faith comes through hearing; hearing the word of Christ.”

All theology is Christology, right? All [true] knowledge/wisdom of God is knowledge/wisdom of Jesus Christ. From Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21, **every word, every jot and tittle and iota points to Jesus** and is about God's love for us in Jesus. You know God; you know God's love for you and for all mankind by knowing Jesus. You can't know God unless you know Jesus! “*No one comes to the Father except through Me.*” **EVERYONE needs to hear this. EVERYONE!**

And what does this knowledge of Jesus look like/sound like in everyday life? Notice: I didn't ask what it looks/sounds like **for one hour on Sunday mornings**. Churches are filled with people who don't know the love of God for them in Christ. They're working hard in the hopes of getting to heaven. **[Cross/Baptism] They just don't know. They don't get it.** Again, St. John tells us very clearly what true knowledge of God looks like and sounds like in everyday life. *"We love because He first loved us. Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God."* We love, not just because He first loved us, but because we know God; we know the love of God.

And that's where the Revelation text appointed for today comes into play (Rev 22:1-6. 12-20). *"Behold, I am coming soon, bringing My recompense with Me, to repay each one for what he has done."* Now, to Old Adam's ears, that sounds only like pure Law. It's terrifying. Jesus is going to return, and He's coming to pay back everyone for what they've done. **Gulp! Lord, have mercy!** And then in an attempt to assuage our fears, we reason that Jesus can't be referring to us because we're saved by grace. Jesus is coming to pay back people for what they've done, which can only mean wicked unbelievers, right? **Wrong.**

Understand: I'm not telling you to be afraid! That's not at all what I'm saying. Just the opposite. For those who know Christ and hold fast to Him and His love for us, **these words are pure grace**. You see, the original Greek makes clear that Jesus is returning, and He's bringing **His misthos** (**wage/reward/recompense**) with Him. Christ very purposefully calls it **"My reward."** It is the reward which Christ Himself earned, and which He freely gives to all believers by grace. Unbelievers get their *misthos*; their wage; the wage for sin, which is death; the justly-deserved wage that they've earned with their sins and by rejecting Christ. But Jesus says very clearly here that He is bringing **"My reward."** By virtue of your baptism into His all-redeeming death and resurrection, His victory is credited to you. His blood-bought wage that He earned with His perfect life and all-atoning death is your reward, purely by God's good grace. Purely by God's grace, because we know and trust in Christ's all-atoning death and resurrection, we receive **His reward**. The "reward" itself is the gift of eternal life in God's holy presence, earned for God's people by the death and resurrection of the Lamb of God. This "wage/reward" is represented by the tree of life (22:2, 14). These words of our Lord at this particular point in Revelation have nothing to do with those who don't know Him; those who reject Him, despise Him, hate Him, and mock Him. **They have no access to the Tree of Life.** *"Lord, let us in!" "Go away. I don't know you."*

Do you know Christ Jesus died for each and every one of your sins? Do you know this cruciform love of God for you in/through Christ? (I didn't ask if you are able to comprehend it. Do you know it? Do you believe it and hold fast to it?) **My friends: Fear not! Rejoice! Christ's reward is your reward.** We absolutely do receive His wage for what we've done. We've believed in Him. We've put our

trust, our hope, our everything in Him. ***Faith believes and holds fast to Christ. That's just what saving faith does.*** “Fear, love, and trust in God above all things.” Faith alone in God’s grace alone, which is ours purely because of Christ alone.

Now, this being the case, I don’t have any prescriptions for you, ***nor should I.*** I’m not going to stand before you and tell you that you need to do this, that, and the other thing. You need to work harder or else! Jesus is coming to dole out payback for what you do! Nope. ***Such preaching is ignorant. It’s unfaithful.*** It’s preaching that doesn’t know the all-redeeming, unconditional, unearned and unmerited cruciform love of God in Christ. ***But you already know all this,*** and for this I am thankful. You know the Truth because you know God and His Christ, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

That said, I’ll end by simply pointing to the cross of Jesus; to the love of God made flesh and hung on a cross, for you, for me, and for all children of Adam. This Good News, as you well-know, is for ***all people, all tribes, all races, all nations.*** You know this Good News. Now explain it. It isn’t difficult. It’s actually quite simple. ***“We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles, but to all those who are called—to all those who know this cruciform Truth and ‘what does this mean’—this is Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” This is Christ, the love of God.*** Maybe the simplest way to explain it: ***“Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.”*** It’s that simple; so simple that even the littlest and lowliest can know it, believe it, hold fast to it, ***and explain it.*** (I’d argue that the littlest ones know it the best, which is why our Lord calls us to have the faith of little children.)

May this Love of God for you in Christ; this peace which surpasses all human knowledge and understanding, guard and keep your hearts and minds in Him, now and into all eternity.

AMEN