

# *Ascension Lutheran Church*

*Pastor Ristau's Sermon for the week of May 11, 2003*

## Being Known By God (I John 3:1-3)

At some point in grade school, every kid wishes that they had a secret admirer: someone who knows all about them, adores them, constantly admires them and sees them as special; someone who would never forget about them but is rather constantly consumed with them. Many of us wish we had one. But you do! Jesus the Christ.

Has one of your kids ever forgotten to call you on your birthday or Mother's Day? Or maybe a parent once mistakenly forgot you in a grocery store? Have you ever been forgotten by a doctor in a waiting room, or an old friend at a party? Have you ever been treated as just another name, another number or statistic in a government record or felt like just another person waiting in line?

Do you ever sense yourself forgotten by God? Just another sheep amongst a massively huge flock, identical to all the rest? But our Lord Himself says that this is not the case. We are not forgotten by God. There are no strangers in His fold, only friends, only children. He knows His sheep and watches out for them, to the point of laying His life down for them.

The word "know" is used a bunch of time in our Epistle and Gospel lesson. When God repeats a word, He wants us to really think about it. He wants us to know, that we are known by Him and not just another number. He is our secret admirer. He knows everything about us, though we shamefully know so little about Him.

Actually it's us who so often forget Him; don't remember Him; don't think about Him. And "If we forget about Him", we wonder, "won't He forget about us?" If God pays as much attention to us as we do Him, then we do have reason to feel forgotten.

Yet thank God that the knowledge doesn't work both ways. Instead, He knows us and watches over us and thinks about us, even though we often don't return the attention. How do I know this? His word says it. And when we remember His word, we see that we aren't forgotten by God. To hear His sweet voice is to know God and His grace; that though yes indeed we forget Him, but He never forgets us. He recognizes each of us baptized believers as His own; He knows us. And just as the Father and Son and Holy Spirit know each other through and through, Jesus knows us likewise.

To really know a subject is to become an expert in that subject. A professor of Chemistry knows everything about science; a doctor of English knows everything about English literature. Well God is an expert in you! He knows you. He knows each hair on your head, each thought in your mind, every prayer before it's uttered from your lips. Almighty God, your creator, knows you through and through. Isn't that great news?

But many people don't know this because they don't take the time to listen, to get to know this information; they don't have the same desire and love to get to know Him, as He has to get to know them. The Bible isn't a subject in which they want to become an "expert". Yet getting to know God through His Word is really simply getting to know how much He knows about you and why this is great news; about getting to know what happened in your baptism and how this has changed your life. Because the thought that God knows you through and through frightens some people, which is why they don't want to think about God and the Christ. He knows the dark secrets, the dark spots, the dark bruises in our inmost being. Nothing is hidden from His divine eye. No sin escapes his attention. Yet Jesus doesn't stand as our accuser with this knowledge. He stands as our secret admirer, the expert of our soul, going into all of those dark places that nobody else knows about, maybe not even yourself, and filling them with light and life.

Yes God knows us through and through. He knows our failures, problems, inadequacies, no secrets are hid from him, yet He calls us His own any way. There is nothing that He doesn't know, which is why it is so remarkable that after knowing everything about us, He still loves us and forgives us all of our sins... kind of like parents.

Moms especially know there kids. They know the good and the bad and the ugly, and despite the bad and the ugly , they still love their kids to bits. Well think of our parent, God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He knows us. He knew us before we were born, before we were even in the womb. "For those whom he fore knew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son" (Rom 8:29). Before you knew yourself God knew you, and knew that you would be here; knew you would be one of His sheep, a Christian, kneeling at His altar even this day. Because that is rightly where God recognizes His sheep, when they gather around Him at the Lord's table, the feeding trough of the altar.

When we kneel before His throne, the altar, it's like carrying a sign that says that "we belong to Jesus" or "we are known by God". We may stink like Hell, and look like sin, but we belong to Jesus. There He sees His sheep and knows them. He knows each one He baptized. And they know Him, His name, clothes, habits, mannerisms, the very smell of His Body and taste of His sweat.

Sometimes when we hear the words "do this in remembrance of me", we think of Holy Communion as something that we do to remember or reminisce about our God or a long ago event. But actually, God remembers us at the altar. Not that He ever forgets us, but He recognizes His own sheep, His children, at His table. Just like you know your family on Mother's day, you remember who you are, that you are family, when you eat together. And when one is missing, it doesn't escape your mother's attention. It's the same with God. "In remembrance of me" is a remembering that He remembers you! It is an acknowledgement that when you kneel here, you are not just another sheep, but that you are His dear child gathering at your father's feet. In light of the fact that many of us don't have families, we are reminded that we are family here in our Father's

house. When you recognize Him present in His Body and Blood, He recognizes you present in your body and blood. You are remembered and known by God in Holy Communion.

Actually "knowing" in the Old Testament is a word reflective of intimacy. In the Song of Solomon, the lovers know each other. In Sodom and Gemorrah, the perverted city residents ask Lot to give them his angelic visitors, so that they may "know them" in a sexual manner. Well the Lord's Supper is really the height of intimacy with our God. This is where one lover meets the next. This is where the known really get to know their secret admirer.

On the other hand there are also those in the world that He doesn't know as His own. They are not in His fold, because they have swept Christ's gentle hand off their hard shoulder, refusing to be made His own, refusing to know God. And so Jesus says to those that don't want Him to know them, "Depart from me I never KNEW you". Those who do not permit themselves to be marked by Him in baptism, in the Word, to eat with Him, who don't want to know how much He knows them and that that is terrific news, are cast out of His kingdom. Those that deny Him, He in the end will deny them. But to you believers, each of you lambs, He doesn't say that. Instead he says, 2 Timothy 2:19 "But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal" the lord knows those who are His" and I Cor 8:3 "if anyone loves God, he is known by God.

Now there is no particular reason why God chooses to know us; there is nothing special about us versus our unbaptized neighbour. The real mystery is why God admires us and seeks to know us and care about us ungrateful and unthankful people. But aren't we glad that He does? That he spends His time getting to know us? He created the world, the animals and trees, in order to give a place for mankind to dwell, so that He could walk with him and know him. And even after we ran from Him, telling Him that we didn't care to know Him, He still went to incredible lengths, to come close to us again; laying down His life even and bringing us into His flock through baptism. We would rather know many other things in life: to know more about cars, sports, business, than about God and to love all these things instead of the things of God. But to know real love, to treasure the things most important, is to know God and the one He has sent. 3:16 "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us". God wanted to get to know us by visiting earth. Do you know how much he loves you? He gave his life for you. Get to know him. For "whoever loves has been born of God and knows God." (I John 4:7)

And getting to know God is not a secretive business. He reveals Himself, His character, all in the Scriptures. So the more you know His word, the more you know Him. Hear Him speak to you about Himself and His love for you by hearing His Scriptures and preaching. Because, I john 2:3-4 "And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his instructions. But whoever says, I know him, but does not hold to his teaching is a liar, and the truth is not in him". Jesus prays in John 17:3 "and this is

eternal life, that they know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent".

And to know God is not merely being satisfied with basic information! It is a continual craving to know His heart more. To be merely acquainted with God is not enough, but rather to seek to be a lover.

There are many Christian these days who are satisfied with a John 3:16 theology. A desire to simply know the basics of who God is, the bare necessity of what we need to know to be saved, is a warped faith. "Tell me the basic information that I need to know to get to heaven and I will be happy" is not reflective of a healthy relationship with God. How much do I need to know about my husband to be his wife? How much do I need to know about my mother to be her child, how much do I need to know about my kids to be their father? What silly logic, and yet often Christians use the same logic in matters of religion and feel satisfied that as long as people somehow know this one bible verse, everything is good with the soul of that believer; never mind that they don't know anything else, or attend any church, or participate in any Holy Communion. "I may not read the Bible or hear your preaching, but all I know is that Jesus saved me, and that's enough for me!" is a lazy faith and dangerous confession. John 3:16 is good for starters and certainly does express the Law and Gospel, but may that not be the last or only Bible passage you ever know! Who would want to be satisfied with the bare basic knowledge about God and His Word? If you really love something, you can't stop thinking and learning about it. So delve into God's word, and if you don't understand it all, no problem, just keep pressing through. But to pride oneself on knowing one or two bible verses and saying that's what Christianity is all about, is immature. Just knowing the name of your husband and few bits of information like where he works, what he does, and nothing else about him, would be a pretty dysfunctional marriage.

Yes John 3:16, is a marvellous verse and talks about the saviour, but it assumes you know more or want to know more about the saviour and His life, parables, prophecies, instructions. Don't be satisfied with a bumper sticker faith. Get to know the Saviour spoken about in that verse more by delving more into the Scriptures, swimming in them, diving in them. And when you come to some hare sports, ask your pastor for help, or come to one of our retreat or Bible study. Don't be a sheep that is satisfied hanging around on the edge of the fence, but be a sheep that persistently presses ever closer to your shepherd and then become ever more knowledgeable about his great love for you.

Get to know your Lord, your lover, as much as he has gotten to know you, and then you will be filled with great love for God and for each other, in the place and community in which God gathers the known, the children, the one flock of Christ.

Who you know is pretty important these days, for a job, a promotion, a career. Often you don't succeed in life based on the merits of your works, but simply succeed upon who you know. You may work and work and work, but if you don't know the right people, or rather, if the right people don't know you, it is all in vain. Well with God, if our salvation was based on our works, none of us would be saved. Instead, by grace God

has gathered you into His flock and made you his own. Thanks be to God that salvation is based on who you know, or rather, who knows you! And yes he also knows all of your flaws, but loves you anyway.

If we ever think ourselves forgotten by God, then we really don't know him very well. Because we mean the world to our Lord. He gave up the world to know us. So may we strive to know him. Christ does not want to remain your secret admirer, but wants you to know that He is your admirer and admires you more than anyone else in the world could ever admire you. He wants you to know about Him so that you can know how much he truly knows about you. Amen.