

Getting to Know Jesus, the Christ

Brentwood Presbyterian Church

January 5, 2014

Don't We Already Know Jesus Christ?

John 16:12-13 & Psalm 147:12-20
(644, 399, 530, 556)

I'm proposing that we spend 2014
getting to know Jesus, the Christ, better.
This will be the focus of our worship
on Sunday mornings and Jazz Evensongs.
This will be the focus of our Bible studies and youth events.
This will be the focus of our educational events and congregational consultations.

I thought it might be helpful this morning
to explain some of my thinking behind this focus for the year.

When it first crossed my mind,
I dismissed it.
"We already know Jesus Christ," I said to myself.
"Most of us have been raised in the church
and have learned about Jesus from day one.
What more can we learn?"

But the Holy Spirit kept pestering me with the idea
of getting to know Jesus, the Christ, better.
I raised it with the Session here at Brentwood
and they thought it was a good idea.
Winston's only insistence
was that we continue to do our Memorize and Ponder process,
so I've chosen short texts to memorize and ponder
for each Sunday this year
as we get to know Jesus, the Christ, better.

The key shift in my thinking
came through a BFO,
what my colleagues in the professional speaking business call
'a blinding flash of the obvious.'
It's not a question of getting to know **about** Jesus,
though that is part of it.
But there is more – much more.

It's a question of getting to **know** Jesus
as an integral part of an intimate relationship.
That's why we said together in our Prayer of Approach this morning,

*Your relationship with us, O God, is like many things –
a marriage, a friendship, a close bond with a brother or sister.*

Yet it is unique.

*In none of those relationships are we
known as well, accepted so unconditionally,
loved so deeply, supported so powerfully,
as in our relationship with you in Jesus, the Christ.*

Think of the most intimate relationships in your lives –
with spouses, children, parents, best friends.
They are not something you know **about**
They are something you **know**
with your whole being –
with your mind, your heart, and your gut,
with your intellect, your emotions, and your instincts.
In fact, the process of coming to **know** that person
works in the opposite sequence from the one I've just described.
You feel the connection in your instincts.
You form an attachment through your emotions.
Then you make sense of that attachment with your intellect.
All three ways of **knowing** are at work
in an integrated and aligned way
to initiate and expand the relationship.

That's how Jesus developed his **knowing** of his Father.
That's how the disciples developed their **knowing** of Jesus.
That's how the Holy Spirit
guides us into deeper and broader **knowing**
of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
this community of God
that lies at the centre of our Christian flourishing.

So, this is much more than knowing **about** someone.
This is **knowing** someone beyond the most intimate and intense
ways you can imagine.

That someone is God the Father,
who revealed himself most fully in Jesus, the Christ,
and who continues to reveal himself through the work of the Holy Spirit.

What John is getting at in the text for our sermon this morning is a crucial dimension of this most intimate form of **knowing** that we have, by God's grace, with the Holy Trinity.

The text is really another of God's promises –
“Fear not. I have more to reveal to you
about the flourishing possible in relationship with me.
And I will be with you always through the work of my Spirit
to bring you into an ever closer relationship with me.”

One of the features of the Reformed/Presbyterian tradition in Christianity that has always attracted my appreciation is John Calvin's deep sense of the inner working of the Holy Spirit.

Nothing works to let us know God
without the inner working of the Holy Spirit –
not Scripture, not the church, not other Christians.
The only way we know God through these means
is by God working in them and through them
to reveal himself/theirselves more fully
so we can flourish more abundantly.

It's all about growth in, and into, a relationship.

If we think we know everything **about** a person,
then we tend to label and categorize that person
into a particular slot in our understanding.

It's easy to freeze them there,
and see them only as a set of characteristics
that either attract or repel us.

If we are drawn into an intimate relationship
with someone who attracts our whole being –
instincts, emotions, and intellect –
then we want to know more about them,
we want to grow in our appreciation of them,
we want to grow together with them,
looking for ways of supporting their growth and ours.
It's a continuous process of growth and nourishing.
It's filled with new possibilities
of reaching greater potential.

Our text this morning invites us into that kind of growth.
It assures us of God's participation in that kind of growth,
indeed, it says that's the only way of being with God.
If we want to consent to God's invitation to relationship,
then we are consenting to continuous growth in **knowing** God.

The best way to **know** God better
is to **know** Jesus, the Christ, better.
And the best way to know Jesus, the Christ, better
is to consent to the education that the Holy Spirit provides
as we gather in community with the Trinity
week after week in a community of the followers of Jesus,
like this one here at Brentwood.

I'm excited about this journey into deeper knowledge
that we are embarking on this year.
I've already learned new things in my research and reflection.
I'm already working with the Spirit
to reframe ways I've understood my faith in the past.
I'm already transformed in my sense of God's presence and power
working in me and through me to nourish my power to bless the world
through the unique gifts God has given me.

It will be an exciting process of nourishment and development.

And an essential part of that nourishment
sits on the Lord's Table here before us.

In the words of invitation to the table,
we are reminded that only after Jesus broke bread and shared wine with them
did the disciples he encountered on the Emmaus road
after his resurrection recognize him.

In celebrating this sacrament together on the first Sunday of every month,
we consent and open ourselves
to **knowing** God more intimately
as the Holy Spirit uses these physical elements of bread and juice
to infuse the love of Jesus Christ
deep into every cell of our bodies.

Come to the table
and let us continue our journey
into a better **knowing** of Jesus, the Christ, together.

*May God fill us all with the joy and resilience
of the love, aspiration, and faith that we see in Jesus, the Christ,
with the LAFter of Jesus Christ,
and be with us as we go forth this week to bless the world.*

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