

How Do We Know God?

Sermon Notes for May 14 2017 at Brentwood



Ps 31:19-24 and John 14:1-14

**If you know me, you will know my Father also.
From now on you do know him and have seen him.
(John 14:7)**

Provocative Ponderings that Call Forth Our Potential in Christ

- I don't know whether any of you have seen the movie version of *The Shack* – I've read the novel, but have not yet seen the movie – the book (it's in our learning library, if you want to read it) raised quite a ruckus when it first came out in, in part because it portrayed God as a black grandmotherly figure steeped in country street smarts – those smarts were bathed in assuring and forgiving love – that was one of the aspirations of the author, William Paul Young, who was born in Grande Prairie, AB – he wanted to get people to imagine God as something more than the old, white-bearded figure so dominant in the Christian imagination of his evangelical world – he pointed out that the Bible used a wide variety of images for God, all of which had to do with the qualities of our relationship with God – knowing God is knowing God in relationship – not as an abstract or distant thing out there – rather as an affectionate and steadfast parent figure who enfolds us with love – someone not shy about pointing out the cost to us and everyone around us of our rebellions against that relationship, but doing so in love in order reconcile through healing love
- Young sees these chapters that we are reading from John's gospel throughout May as the very heart of the Christian faith – the Christian way of being in the world – we know God as we become aware of God's intimate, creative, sustaining, and reforming relationship with us at the very centre of our beings – we know God through God's love for us and that is most powerfully seen in and exhibited by Jesus, the Christ, whose Spirit infuses us with knowledge of that love – as we say every month in our celebration of the Lord's Supper – we flourish "in Christ, through Christ, and with Christ" – ancient words in the Christian tradition that have been repeated generation after generation because of their power to reveal God's love - only in this nourishing relationship that God has restored with all of humanity and all of creation in Jesus Christ do we know what God is truly like – how divine love works – Paul has been one of the best poets in putting this dynamic into words in 1 Cor 13:4-7 – their power is so attractive that people who have nothing to do with the church tear up in weddings when they are heard – I looked over several translations of this passage and decided to read Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of it *The Message* (also available in our Duncan Learning Library):

Love never gives up.
Love cares more for others than for self.
Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.
Love doesn't strut,

Notes for a sermon preached by Brian Fraser,
minister with Brentwood Presbyterian Church, Burnaby, BC

Doesn't have a swelled head,
Doesn't force itself on others,
Isn't always "me first,"
Doesn't fly off the handle,
Doesn't keep score of the sins of others,
Doesn't revel when others grovel,
Takes pleasure in the flowering of the truth,
Puts put with anything,
Trusts God always,
Always looks for the best,
Never looks back,
But keeps going to the end.

- I am constantly surprised and saddened by the rebellions that human beings, including myself, devise to avoid accepting that love and living joyfully within its nourishing embrace – take some time this week and think about the ways you are resisting and rejecting the love that God offers you in Jesus Christ – here's one diabolical attitude in particular to watch for – "I am not worthy" – that one can undermine faith and hope with great subtlety and power – but I'm sure you will recognize many more when you focus some attention on them – and I'm also sure that the Spirit will use that attention to deepen your awareness of and appreciation for the depth and breadth of God's love for you – out of that will grow a deeper and broader knowledge of God and the mission of a flourishing creation that he invites you into

At this point in our ponderings, then ...

I'm convinced that we know what matters most in our lives through love – you never come to know something deeply unless you love what you are learning – in Christianity, you come to know God by accepting and apprenticing in their love – using 'their' again to remind us of the instructive power of the image of God as Trinity, as loving community – and we know God ever more fully as we are drawn into the joyful and inspiring dance of that divine community – as we say every week in the concluding prayer at Jazz Evensong:

Draw our souls into the swing of your blessing, O Lord,
and go with us into your world
to play the music of your beauty, justice, peace, and joy.