

June 16, 2019

*John 8:28: **“Jesus: “I Am!”***

*Pilgrim Lutheran Church
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In the church calendar, today is the Sunday of *The Holy Trinity*. When I was a kid growing up at Pilgrim, and the moment would come when I realized that we were going to confess the interminably long *Athanasian Creed*, my sinful flesh viewed the day as a mild form of torture. However, it's a masterful creed and extremely important. I think that because of the factual language it tends to feel cold, at least until the end. Perhaps the precision of the creed somehow causes us to see God more as an abstraction rather than the Living God. To know God means not merely knowing things about Him; that He is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; that He is righteous, almighty, wise, good, and loving. Yes, all these things are important and fundamental, but knowing God goes beyond such facts.

When you look at the Bible, our knowledge of God is similar to our knowledge by acquaintance. God is a living and speaking God who makes himself known to the heart, which results in love. He is personal and intimate and affects our lives. Jesus says in John 17:3, "And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." Here Jesus declares that salvation and eternal life are the results of knowing God personally and intimately - by what he has done for sinners through his undeserved love on the cross. And Paul says in 2 Timothy 1:12, "I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me."

Christ knows his sheep, and his sheep know him (John 10:14). Knowledge by acquaintance is personal, experiential, and a relationship based on facts and information about God and what he has done to save us. God is the Living God who touches us in the history of mighty acts and the redemptive acts of Jesus as well as the pure teaching of the biblical Gospel which recounts these acts and interprets them for us. We know him only when we are known by him. As Paul writes, "But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more (Gal. 4:9)?"

God must know us that we may truly know him. In the Scriptures the knowledge of God and the knowledge of salvation are inextricably linked. The reason why the Jews in our text could not hear the words of God was due to the fact that they were not of God. Oh, they heard what Jesus said, but they did not hear them in the sense of belief. In fact, they concluded, against better knowledge, that Jesus must have a demon. On the other hand, Abraham rejoiced in the day of Jesus. He saw it from a distance and was glad. So the Jews said to Christ, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

Abraham had a knowledge of God by acquaintance, the Jews had a knowledge of God that caused them to pick up stones to kill him. Robert D. Preus writes in *The Living God*,

To know our Savior Christ, therefore, is to have salvation and to know God; and there is no other way to know God. "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known (John 1:18)." Just prior to this text John had spoken of the

Incarnation (1:14) and said that divine grace and truth are gained only through Christ. No man can see God and live. Yet the Son declares that God makes himself known to all who know and believe in the Son. So Jesus can say that one who has seen Him, the incarnate Son, has seen the Father (John 14:9). In fact, He can assure believers in Him of eternal life because He and the Father are one essence (John 10:30) and because He and the Father work in intimate union as He carries out the works of salvation (John 10:38).

Our theme is **Jesus: I Am**. To know Jesus is to know God himself. Facts without being acquainted with Jesus are just facts that are twisted and perverted by sin. We have a knowledge of God and eternal life only when we know Christ as Savior. John writes in his first epistle (5:20), "And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life." Luther writes: "Scripture begins tenderly and leads us to Christ as a man, then to the Lord over all creatures and to God. In this way I advance gently and learn to know God. But philosophy and worldly-wise people desired to begin at the top - and thereby they became fools."

How do we then know Christ? We know him and receive his grace through the informative and powerful Gospel word of Scripture. In the means of grace is knowledge of God. Again, Robert D. Preus:

The Bible speaks less about the essence and attributes of God than about His works in history and in the lives of believers . . . The emphasis throughout Scripture upon the actions of God, upon His intervention in history and His dealings with people, shows us that He is a living God. He fights for them and guides them (1 Sam. 17:26, 36); He loves His people and comforts them, and when they thirst after Him, He fills them (Ps. 42) and they find rest in Him (Ps. 84:3; Matt. 11:28-29). The living God is utterly dependable.

When Jesus identified himself as "I Am" to the Jews, it no doubt brought Moses into their minds and the burning bush that did not burn up. It is at the bush that God reveals his heart to Moses and makes it clear that he has come to deliver his people from their slavery in Egypt. This slavery in Egypt is a picture of our slavery to sin, death, and the devil. The Exodus, that is so powerfully linked to the Passover lamb who is Jesus the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, is clearly connected to the intimate name of God: Yahweh (Lord). Moses wants to know what he should say to the people if they inquire about the name of God. In the book of Exodus (3:14-17) we read:

God said to Moses, "I am who I am." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I am has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations. Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, "I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt, and I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land . . . flowing with milk and honey."'

The name of God is everything revealed about him in the Scriptures. As you can see in the burning bush text, and you can read it in other places, everything revealed about the name of God is to lead us to and from his work to deliver us from sin, death, and the devil. He is Yahweh (Lord)! Jesus Christ is really the all-pervasive theme of Scripture. God's written Word is not an impersonal philosophy, but speaks to us judgment and salvation. You can see that this is a knowledge by acquaintance in the Exodus text. He says to the Israelites that he has observed them and all that has been done to them, and he will bring them up from their affliction into the land that is flowing with milk and honey. This land flowing with milk and honey was a picture of heaven not only for them but for all of us, so that our knowledge of the Living One is also one by acquaintance. To the Jews he says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." What will we do with such a statement? The Lord exists and is the only one who can save.

God has seen our affliction and has promised deliverance through his one and only Son. The personal God who is present for us through the atoning work of Christ and present in us through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit is the one who truly knows us, and by his knowledge of us, makes us his own. He knows the predicament we are in due to sin and death. He knows our weaknesses, our needs, and the secrets of our hearts. No desire for peace or forgiveness, no groaning is hidden from him. This knowledge is both personal and intimate, and this is of tremendous comfort to us as we trust in him who is - **Jesus: I Am.**

If you have ever read John 14-16, you will see the personal nature of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit on display in the teachings of Jesus. He tells us that if we know him, we know the Father. If we have seen him, we have seen the Father. The Father sends another Comforter, the Spirit of truth, who abides with us and testifies concerning Jesus and guides us into all truth. The world does not see him or know him, but we know him. The existence of our faith is proof that he is in us and we know him with the Father and the Son. Throughout these powerful teachings of Jesus in John 14-16, we are not brought to an abstraction, but to the Living One who brings us eternal life. In the Scriptures we learn what God is like, we learn his identity, who he is: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - and his personal will for us. Here we stand on holy ground and behold the true and only God who saves us - the Triune God.

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott - This sermon is heavily based upon the thoughts and insights of Robert D. Preus in his work titled *The Living God*.