

“Core Values: Knowing Christ”

John 14:1-17 • Colossians 1:9-23

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • February 26, 2017

There’s an old saying that I used to hear frequently when I worked in politics that goes, “It’s not what you know but who you know.” We find the same thing in the Bible. We are almost finished studying our core values and we’re now down to the two that make up our mission statement. As you know, our mission is “living to know Christ and to make Christ known.” The purpose of the church, as the Apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 4, is to equip you to live to know Jesus and help others know him. So this morning we’re going to look at what we mean when we say we value knowing Christ.

The place to begin is by understanding what we mean by knowing. What does it mean to know? And then what does it mean to know Christ? It seems to me that there are basically three ways of knowing – three categories of knowledge. The first category is knowing facts. This is the kind of knowledge we get in school or from studying a subject. Do you know the square root of 4? Yes. It’s two. Do you know how many ounces in a pound? Yes. Sixteen. Do you know when the Texas Declaration of Independence was adopted? Yes. March 2, 1836. Do you know Avogadro’s Number? No. But some people do.

This is head knowledge and it’s learned from other people. Either we’re taught by someone or we learn it by reading what someone else has written. It’s certainly important to have this kind of knowledge. But that’s not the only way we know things. The second way of knowing is by experience. There are lots of things we know because we have personally experienced them. You don’t have to tell me that a sunburn hurts. I don’t have to take a class to know that ice cream is delicious. Sadly, many of us learn by experience because we are unwilling to learn from someone else. We have to learn the hard way. Here’s a good way to understand the relationship between these two types of knowing. The first time you

go to someone’s house you need directions or a map. That’s the first way of knowing – head knowledge. But after you’ve been to their house several times you don’t need the map. You *know* the way. That’s experience knowledge.

There’s a third category of knowing and that’s knowing a person. This involves the other two ways but is a much deeper kind of knowing. If I’m going to get to know you it will begin by learning facts about you – where you grew up, what kind of family you have, where you went to school, what kind of work you do, what you like to do for fun. These are all important facts that can be useful. But I can know these things *about* you without actually *knowing* you. This kind of knowing is all about relationship. It’s very personal. In fact, the Bible describes marital intimacy with the word “to know.” Genesis 4:1 says, “Now Adam *knew* Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain.” God designed marriage so that a husband and wife would experience this kind of close, intimate knowing of each other – not just physically but also emotionally and spiritually.

It’s this kind of knowing that we are talking about when we say we value knowing Christ. We value knowing him personally, in a relationship. I think too often, though, we end up focusing our attention on knowing *about* Jesus without actually knowing Him. We read and study the Bible to learn facts about God but miss having a relationship with Him. But you’re not the first person to do this. In fact, as we look at this passage from John 14 we find Jesus’ own disciples doing the same thing. Jesus has been with them nearly every day for three years. They have a relationship. Now he’s preparing to go to the cross and then to heaven. He tells his disciples, “if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going.” This is all deep relationship stuff. Thomas says, “we don’t know where you’re going. How can we know the

way?" He's stuck on facts. Philip says, "show us the Father, and it is enough for us." He's stuck on experience. Jesus shows them that it's through the personal relationship with Him that they will understand the facts and experiences.

Now that we understand what we mean by knowing, what does it mean to know Christ? In other words, who is Jesus? In Matthew 16 Jesus is with his disciples and he asks them, "Who do people say that I am?" They answer that some people think he's Elijah, others think he's John the Baptist back from the dead, and some think he's a prophet. But then Jesus asks them, "Who do *you* say that I am?" That's the question that every one of us has to answer. Who is Jesus? We wouldn't have time in one message to look at everything the Bible says about who Jesus is but I want us to look at these two passages we read this morning.

In John 14 what we find is not someone's interpretation of who they think Jesus is. We have Jesus telling us directly who he is. When Philip asks Jesus to show them the Father, Jesus answers, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." In other words, Jesus is explicitly saying that he is God. He says the same thing in John 10 when he says, "I and the Father are one." Sometimes people will argue that Jesus never claimed to be God but that other people said it about him after he was crucified. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The Scriptures are very clear that Jesus is fully God. John 14 begins with Jesus saying, "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me." Don't let that word "also" trip you up. That verse could be equally be translated, "You believe in God, therefore believe in me."

Colossians 1:15 calls Jesus "the image of the invisible God," and goes on to explain that "by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth...all things were created through him and for him." Jesus is the God who spoke the universe and everything in it into existence. He's also the one who holds everything together (verse 17). Then in verse 19 Paul is clear again when he says that in Jesus "all the

fullness of God was pleased to dwell." Some of you have heard me say that one of my pet peeves is when people talk about "God *and* Jesus." Jesus IS God. That's why when Jesus says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me," he's not excluding people from reaching God by claiming that they have to go through him. The reason Jesus is the only way to God is because he IS God. That's why we say, "we believe that faith in Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation."

So this is great information but how do we use it? How do we apply this to our lives? How do we know Christ? I think our three ways of knowing are helpful here. First, we read the Bible. We read the gospels to hear Jesus speak and learn what he says and does. You could call this learning the facts about Jesus. In John 14:15 Jesus says, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." It's pretty obvious that if you're going to keep his commandments you need to know what they are. But it's not just the gospels we need to read. When you read the Old Testament remember that Jesus is the same God who spoke to Abraham and Moses and David.

The second thing we must do is experience Jesus. We want to know what he's like first hand. We do that through prayer. Through prayer you have the opportunity to have a relationship with Jesus. How are you doing with that? Last week I suggested that you should pray longer than you have words. This week let me ask you, when was the last time you prayed without asking for anything from God? During this coming week, try praying without asking for anything. Simply praise Jesus for who He is. We also experience Jesus in worship and by participating in his body, which is the church (Colossians 1:19). When we worship and study and serve together we experience Jesus among us in a way that we just don't on our own.

Finally, when you begin to have that kind of relationship with Jesus you will discover that part of knowing Christ is being known by him. That's a little scary because when you

experience being known by Jesus you realize your sinfulness. You want to hide. At the beginning of John's gospel Jesus is calling his first disciples. He meets Philip and says, "follow me." Philip goes and finds his friend Nathaniel and says, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nathaniel says, "Nazareth, really? That dump? Can *anything* good come out of Nazareth?" But Philip tells him to come see for himself. When Nathaniel meets Jesus he discovers that Jesus already knows everything about him. Jesus says to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were sitting

under the fig tree, I saw you." It occurred to me that at this moment Nathaniel realizes that Jesus also knows what he said about Nazareth. Jesus knows everything Nathaniel has done or said. You can't keep secrets from Jesus. But at that moment Nathaniel also discovered that even though Jesus knows him fully, he also loves him. And when discover that Jesus knows all your dark secrets, that he knows everything about you, you also experience being loved and forgiven by him. And your life will never be the same, because you *know* Christ.

Amen.