

People of God, it is the fourth Sunday of Advent, and the time is coming when God to earth descendeth. When the Heavens will drop down like dew upon the virgin Mary, who, like the dry earth opened and received the rain and brought forth the Savior. This righteous one will come to deliver us and save us from our sins, and we shall know God.

The question that I want to drive home in today's sermon is, Do you know God? Do you know the Lord Jesus Christ? We may know about Him, we may about things that God and Christ have done, but the question that is at the heart of the Christian faith, for every believer, is do you know Him?

One may see that the whole reason that God created Man was that we would know Him. The knowledge of God, not as a concept to merely be studied, but as a person to be intimately known, is what the story of redemption in the Bible is about.

"In one sense all people know God, but in another more important sense, the knowledge of God is the exclusive privilege of God's redeemed people, and indeed is the ultimate goal of the believers life." – John Frame

And it was with the fall of Man into sin that that our knowledge of God, was fractured and destroyed. We once had perfect fellowship and knowledge of God. We walked with Him in the Garden and had communion at the Tree of Life with him. But God warned us, saying that, "In the day in which you eat of that tree of knowledge of good and evil, dying you shall die." And upon eating of that tree, we then became terrified of God. We hid ourselves from God, terrified of what we had become, and terrified of God's perfect holiness. Our shame and fear drove us

to hide ourselves from God, and we lost our knowledge of Him. This is the death that occurred on that day.

The rest of the story of redemption can therefore be seen as God taking steps toward wooing his people back to Him, to restore in us the knowledge of God and eternal life.

When God sets his heart to redeem Israel from their slavery in Egypt, which is also a picture of the human hearts slavery to sin and death, God sets forth his motives and intentions for doing this, saying, *“I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall **know** that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.”* It is through God’s mighty acts of deliverance that he makes himself known to his people.

Interestingly, Pharaoh, when Moses told him that the LORD, the God of Israel demanded that Israel be let go, he responded saying, *“Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not **know** the LORD, and moreover, I will not let Israel go.”*

The image of Pharaoh then is likened unto the fallen man inside of each of us, being the fierce slave master who does not want us to be freed from our bondage. It is like the old fallen Adam inside each of us has grown up to become a wicked tyrant and slave master, keeping us in bondage to our sins. And where Moses tried to appeal to deep memory of Him, the reality is, the fall has destroyed the knowledge of God from our minds. And so he says, I do not know the LORD.

The whole of the Exodus, then, with the 10 plagues and the Passover and the Red Sea Crossing, all of it, were all ways in

which God made himself known, to Pharaoh and Egypt, and to Israel.

He says, *The Egyptians shall **know** that I am the LORD, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them.*"

And with every plague it is the same, God is going to do this great and wonderful thing, so that you may know that the LORD is God. Over and over again he does this. And we see that with Pharaoh, every day he wakes up and has spiritual amnesia. He forgets who the LORD is, and he hardens his heart.

Until finally, when God bring them to the Red Sea, and Pharaoh pursues them one last time. And the LORD said, *"And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD."*

And so he did. They knew who the LORD was in all His glory. And Moses knew too when he sang His song of victory on the other side of the Red Sea, after seeing the dead bodies of Pharaoh's armies wash up on the shores of the Red Sea, saying,

*The LORD is my strength and my song,
And he has become my salvation;
And this is my God, and I will praise Him,
My Father's God, and I will exalt Him.
The LORD is a man of war;
The LORD is His name.*

And then, only three days later, Israel forgets all that he had just taught them about who the LORD is, and what God had done for them. So he makes bitter waters sweet, teaching them that the LORD is a healer. He sends bread from heaven, teaching them the LORD is the Bread of Life from Heaven. Then he sends water from the Rock, teaching them that the LORD is among them as the Living Water. The people grumbled, asking, is the LORD among us or not, which is just another way of saying, I don't know who the LORD is.

And so God sought to reveal himself to Israel in one momentous occasion where they would truly come to know who he is. For that is God's desire in all these events. God is trying to make himself known to us. And so the Lord reveals himself on the top of Mt. Sinai in glory and power and might and thunder and lightening and fire and smoke.

And just like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, when God walked in the wind of the day, and they were scared and they hid themselves, so too was Israel absolutely terrified of God. The Thundering voice of the Lord was enough to literally scare people to death. And so, being sinners who knew not their God, they were fine keeping their distance, and having a mediator to communicate to them from God.

So the people told Moses to speak to them for God, but do not let God speak directly to us, lest we die. And this brings us to our OT passage today in Deut. 18. Where God says that the people were right in asking Moses to do this. Because in our fallen state, and because of the awesome holiness of God, if God were to speak directly to us, without a mediator, we would die.

Somehow God preserved Moses from dying, and he became the mediator between God and Israel. He heard directly from God and did not die. But the people used this separation via a mediator to give themselves more permission to sin. It was because Moses was on Mt Sinai receiving the law of God that they told Aaron to build the golden calf. And Aaron said, *"these are your gods, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt."*

Notice then that the reason why idolatry is such a horrible sin, is because it confuses and obscures, and lies about who the True God really is. For it is only the true knowledge of God that we have eternal life.

And so God said that one day he is going to send another Prophet like Moses, in this regard. A man from among their brothers, a fellow Israelite, and God will put his words in His mouth, and he shall speak God's words to God's people. And everyone will have to listen to him, and the person who doesn't God will require it of him.

This Prophet is of course the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is not a mediator who serves to keep God and Man at a distance from each other. He is the God-Man, the glory of God incarnate. And he comes to earth to draw closer to us than God ever has been, so that we might know God better. He comes to close the gap between us, by becoming one of us.

This Prophet like Moses does not just speak the words of God to the people, he is the very Word of God incarnate. He came to the earth to make men hear God's voice and to know him again, and live.

But as John's Gospel states, much like the Jews who were in Egypt, Jesus *came to his own, but his own did not know him.*

John the Baptist arrives on the scene, and the people want to know, "*Are you the Prophet?*" John is a voice, he is the voice of one crying in the wilderness, '*Make straight the way of the Lord*' as Isaiah the prophet said. But he is not the voice of God, though. He is a prophet, but he is not THE Prophet.

And then they asked him why he is baptizing, John's answer points to the people's problem, and it points to everyone's problem. He says,

I baptize with water, but there stands one among you who you do not know.

Why does he tell them they do not know him? Because Israel is spiritually in Egypt, they need one who is like Moses to come and perform a New and Greater Exodus in order to make them know who their God is.

And so, *John came baptizing with water, that Jesus might be revealed to Israel.* Just as God revealed himself to Israel in the great and mighty acts of the Exodus and the crossing of the Red Sea, so is Jesus going to reveal himself to Israel in John's Baptism in the wilderness.

And John bore witness, saying: I saw the Spirit descend from Heaven like a dove, and it remained on Him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.

And John then says, this is the one who *will baptize with the Holy Spirit. And I have seen and borne witness that this is the Son of God.*

Notice that it was at Jesus' baptism that John came to know who Christ was. God's revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ was first manifested at His baptism. And that revelation was made known by the Holy Spirit.

And likewise, people of God, we too come to know who Jesus is, when Jesus baptizes us with the Spirit in water baptism.

And when people are baptized with the Spirit, we are like John saying,

Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

For in baptism when you behold the Lamb of God, you first see Him who is without sin, perfect in holiness, righteousness, goodness and love, awesome and majestic, and glorious in splendor, and you cannot but compare yourself to him. Like when Isaiah comes into the presence of God and he immediately confesses how sinful he is, so too, when you truly Behold the Lamb of God, Your spirit knows itself in that moment, like no other moments, that you are indeed a lost dead sinner who has been cut off from God.

And you know that God is the one you do not know. And this gracious action of God, wherein He reveals to you your sin, is the first step toward leading a person to truly knowing God.

As John Calvin said: *"Every person, therefore, on coming to this knowledge of himself, (and his sinfulness) is not only urged to seek God, but is also led as by the hand to find Him."*

And, “...men are never duly touched and impressed with a conviction of their insignificance, until they have contrasted themselves with the majesty of God.”

This fourth week of Advent, John the Baptist is pointing the way to Christ in His baptism. And he said that one is coming who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. Thanks be to God, we were blessed to have two such baptisms today. For here in water baptism, we have the baptism of the Holy Spirit. For here our Lord promises that this is the laver of regeneration, the place where the guilt of our original sin is washed away, that even here, for these little ones, is where we come to know Christ. As the prophet Jeremiah said, even the least of these will know God.

So, what is the first thing we see of Christ, by faith in our baptisms? **Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.** This is what Christ testifies to you today, that by His grace he removes our sins and their punishment and the power of them and makes us His own in baptism.

And so, Behold the Lamb of God! See in Him all that you are not. See in Christ, the radiance of His excellent goodness. See in Him the very Light of Light, the Life of and Life, True God of True God, eternally begotten of the Father, the word of God made flesh.

Look to him, Behold him with the eyes of your heart and soul, and come to know Him as He who takes away your sins. For this is your first true knowledge of God that we receive from Christ, even at our baptisms, that He forgives you of all your sins.

Do you know Him, People of God?

God Almighty, by Your all good, holy, and Life-giving Spirit, help us to know and to be known by Christ, and to have eternal life in Him, as he abides in us, and we in Him through the power of the Holy Spirit, and in the grace of the forgiveness of all our sins given to us at our baptisms. Amen.

Communion Meditation

Theologians tell us there are two chief way in which God reveals Himself to people. The first is General Revelation, which is through the Creation. And the other is Special Revelation, which is the Bible. And what the glory of Special Revelation does is it gives us the lenses through which we can see the Natural World in such a way that it becomes to us, a kind of special revelation. What do I mean?

To know Christ is to see in every tree the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The Trees call to us to make a choice to love God more.

To know Christ it to be able to look beyond the tree to the one who hung on the tree for our salvation. And in this way to see all trees as the tree of life.

To know Christ is to believe that the water which flowed forth from his pierced side is present in all water. And therefore it is to know that all water is a saving flood for the washing away of sins.

To know Christ is to see all rocks as the Rock of Christ which followed Israel in the wilderness, and from which, when struck, came forth water of life.

To know Christ is to know that all birds are the Dove who lighted upon Jesus at His baptism.

To know Christ is to remember your baptism every time it rains, and every time you take a shower.

To know Christ is to remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return, every time you plant a seed in the dirt, or every time you clean the dirt from off your child's face.

To know Christ is to tread upon the head of the serpent every time you walk in the dust.

To know Christ is to look into his eyes of blazing fire every time you look at an open flame.

To know Christ is to feel His Spirit every time the wind blows upon your face.

To know Christ is to hunger and thirst for righteousness every time you sit down to eat.

To know Christ is to be fainting of thirst in a dry and weary land where there is no water, and realizing that you what you really need and want is Christ.

To know Christ is to cherish His birth in Bethlehem every time you see a star.

To know Christ is to hold firm to the eternal word of God every time you cut the grass, for the grass withers, and the flower fades, but the word of God endures forever.

To know Christ to be the Light of the World every time the sun rises.

To know Christ is to see the infant Jesus in the face of every crying and cooing baby.

To know Christ is to know all of your secret sins, and to know they are all forgiven.

To know Christ is receive every morsal of bread as the Body of Christ, and every sip of wine as the blood of Christ.

All this is confirmed to us here in the Lord's Supper, as we partake of the sanctified creation, which, by faith confers to us the gifts of eternal life in Christ. This gives us great cause to lift up your hearts!