

## BEING KNOWN AND KNOWING

### *Back to Church Sunday and Baptism*

#### *John 17: 1-5*

Some months ago I ended up watching the wedding of William and Kate. And as I watched the carriages, the clothes, the hats, the procession and even the back door of Buckingham Palace shown to us, let alone the balcony scene, I found myself wondering how many people at their wedding William and Kate actually knew and how many actually knew them. What did the crowds milling outside really know or know about them. What was allowed to be publicly known? There is no doubt that members of ‘the Firm’ would know them and be known back.

Recently Cadell Evans won the Tour De France and became known by the world. But how many actually know him and are known by him? Maybe his wife, his mum and family, his hometown and maybe his bike club members. The rest of us know a little about him and specifically his highly developed skill in riding.

In the Gospel today Jesus says: “*This is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent.*”

This verse raises the stakes on ‘knowing’ – *This is eternal life that they may know you.*

Knowing is indeed important and this kind of knowing is obviously eternally important – so we are told by One who knows and the One who was about to conquer death and sin on our behalf. And these are His words just before He actually voluntarily died to make it possible for us to have eternal life.

Jesus is not talking about knowing about the one true God here but is talking ‘knowing’. The Greek word used here is ‘*ginosko*’ (gi nos ko) and it indicates that the knowledge is obtained not by mere intellectual activity, but by a revelation of God to us, involving the operation of the Holy Spirit consequent upon the acceptance of Christ<sup>1</sup>. Some scholars believe that this knowing is not describing to ‘know perfectly’ or to ‘just recognise’, but to ‘learn to know’. That it is an ever increasing knowledge and not something given in its completeness once and for all.<sup>2</sup>

The rest of this chapter in John is worth reading as Jesus goes on to reveal His heart, just before His death, and prays the deepest prayers for us to know God. Vv 26-27 later in the chap: “*Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know You, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them and will*

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<sup>1</sup> Vines complete expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words, p 346

<sup>2</sup> Leon Morris. The New International Commentary on the New Testament, the Gospel According to John, Eerdmans, 1971, p 719

*continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”*

It is really on His heart for us to know God. Intimately!

So how do we do that and why is it important?

It is important because as our reading tells us today it is part of what Eternal life is about.

God is Spirit – neither male nor female – and knowing God requires a desire on our part to enter into a relationship with God. But God makes this easy for us by consistently reaching out to us in love and having made us to be participants in relationship with Him. It is hard to go past the well known John 3:16 verse that tells us that God so loved the world He sent His only Son, Jesus to bring those who would believe in Him to eternal life. We are told that at the beginning of Jesus life in John’s Gospel and here we are in chapter 17 just before He dies and He again is concerned that we know how to receive eternal life. In another part of John’s Gospel in 3:3 when Jesus is talking to a Pharisee named Nicodemus, Jesus makes it clear that no one can see the kingdom of God unless that person is born again. In verses 5-7 Jesus repeats the importance of this: “...*I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he/she is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.*”

We have been made to be reunited with God. We can enjoy being in relationship with another person but only at certain times, because the other person is external to us. However, the enjoyment of God is permanent and lasting because it is within. God, and eternal life with God, is our final goal.

This is why when a child or baby is baptised that we teach in the preparation class that the parents and godparents commit to bringing the little one up to know Jesus and be known by Jesus. For their eternal life depends upon it. When someone is baptised they are marked as belonging to Christ – but there is more to eternal life than that. They are to be taught to know God, the one true God and His Son Jesus. What they are taught when little makes a big difference in the choices they make later. I hear a lot of parents saying that they will get their child baptised and then let them make up their own minds later. How can they make them up if they have not got to know Jesus? How can they come into their inheritance if they do not know the one true God?

All grandparents here today– you most likely have known God for many years – share the memories, share the story of your own coming to know Jesus. This is a testimony. Share the times you know God was with you. Share the time you know prayers were answered. Share the peace that can be had walking with God, trusting God. Share what it is like to know that Jesus is the Good Shepherd who walks with

you in good times and bad, through the valley of the shadow of death and to the green pastures.

Thinking of shared story, no one could miss that today's date is Sept 11. Just saying the date declares a global memory – and of course a poignant one for the US. Amongst the bombardment of remembering that has been going on last Friday's Canberra Times had an article by Karen Hardy telling us about Genelle Guzman-McMillan's story of being trapped for 27 hours after the collapse of the first tower. Genelle has written a book called Angel in the Rubble: How I survived for 27 hours under the World Trade Centre Debris.

Like many Genelle didn't evacuate immediately after the first plane hit. She worked on the 64<sup>th</sup> floor and was initially told to stay working. But at 10 am their manager tells them to get out by the stairs. They pass the fire crews coming up on the 42<sup>nd</sup> floor who tell them to keep going and that they will be all right. But on the 13<sup>th</sup> floor the whole North Tower collapses suddenly.

I quote from the newspaper account of her description:

"The walls surrounding us burst open like a couple of semi-trucks had smashed through them.... the floor under our feet was cracking every which way. I put my face down and covered my head with my arms as concrete chunks of every shape and size poured down from above and pounded my body, like I was being stoned to death. I dropped hard to my knees while the North Tower of the World Trade Centre fell on top of me. Finally after what felt like forever, the crashing stopped. When it did, my world shifted. It went from a white cloud of dust and whirlwind of pandemonium to total darkness and sheer silence.

... was I dead?" She writes. "I could not see anything. I could not hear anything. I was in a lot of pain from head to toe. If I'm feeling pain, I thought, I couldn't be dead right? I felt like I was still breathing, but how on earth could I be alive. Didn't a tower just fall on me? I began to wonder if this could all be a really bad dream, I needed to find a way to bring myself out of it."

That way was prayer. ... born and raised in Trinidad, Genelle is the first to admit she made some poor choices in her life to that point. She had left her daughter Kimberley behind in Trinidad with her father, she was sleeping with her boyfriend Roger even though they weren't married, and partying hard every weekend. Raised a Catholic, she hadn't found time for faith in New York.

She continues "Growing up I had been slowly walking a road towards hell with my ignorance about God and had picked up the pace as I ignored Him in adulthood. Now I was at the very end of that road standing on hell's doorstep. It seemed natural to take those last couple of steps through that door and live the eternally damned life that I deserved. It was the simplest of choices at this point. I could feel the devil welcoming me.

But was it my only choice?"

Thinking of her daughter, of her family, of Roger, (Genelle) Guzman-McMillan decided eternal damnation was not her only choice and turned to God.

She says: "I had to look at this makeshift grave I was buried in as a confessional and I had to believe God was listening ... and that He cared. But it had to be more than words. I couldn't just confess my sins, say I was sorry, toss in a Hail Mary or two and wait for the debris to open up above me.

There had to be substance to it. I had to mean it. It had to come from the heart ....

"God. Its Genelle," she said timidly. "I'm in a difficult situation right now, one that I got myself into, and I need your help."

Her mother had always told her to live the life of the Lord but she hadn't realised how crucial that was until that point. It was a strangely freeing experience.

At roughly 9.15 am on Wednesday September 12, that experience became a reality. A search and rescue dog, Trakr, a seven year old German Shepherd, from Halifax, Nova Scotia, picked up her scent. At about the same time a man reached down and grabbed her hand. "I've got you Genelle", he said. The rescuers came closer and closer, she could hear them talking, the debris above her started to move. 'They are almost here, Genelle ... you're in good hands now ...I'm going to let go and let them do their jobs and get you out, okay?'

... (she) couldn't remember "Paul" letting go and the fireman taking over. "it was a heavenly transition she writes. And it may well have been for Rick Cushman and Brian Buchanan, the two rescue workers who dug her out at about 12.30pm, have no recollection of anyone else there.

In fact the mysterious man, Paul was never seen by anyone else or found later. And Genelle realised that he knew her name. And that there was no way he could have known it.'

Genelle concludes that he must have been an angel sent in response to her prayer.

It is a story of such hope. What stands out to me too is that she knew to turn to God and that she had another choice because she had been brought up to know she could talk to God and that He would know her.

God knows us. He knows us from within the womb – Jer 1:5 "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you." This meaning of knew can also be 'chose' you.

And He will never forget us. Genelle was not forgotten even though she went her own way. This is the wonderful nature of God and His unfathomable love for each of

us. Isaiah 49: 15-16 says *“Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have carved you on the palms of my hands...”*

Jesus reminded us in many ways of just how much God wants us to know Him and be known by Him. John 10: 14 Jesus said: *“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me v 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father PAUSE - and I lay my life down for the sheep”*.

This is the depth of the knowing Jesus longs for us to have – to know Him in the same way He and the Father know each other. The best way to know someone is to live with him or her. Jesus and the Father are the One. Getting to know Jesus means we get to know the Father. Jesus told Thomas one of His followers that if you know Me you know the Father. If you have seen me you have seen the Father.

The best way to know someone is to live with him or her. To do that with Jesus we simply ask Him to come and live in us. And because He is holy we clean out our house first and tell Him we are sorry for doing things that are not right.

When we ask Jesus to come and live in us we are enabled to get to know Him intimately and getting to know Jesus means getting to know the Father. But once we have Jesus living within we mustn't neglect Him but talk to Him, listen to Him and get to know Him.

Live with Him. It is as simple as that – live with Jesus as each of us would with someone really special to us.

[As Meredith Isabelle grows introduce her to Jesus. Teach her to talk to Jesus and to listen to Him. Help her to read about Him and His love for her in the Bible. Help her to belong to a community of people who know Jesus – the church – which is God's family on earth. For Baptism is an entry rite into the church – so as you move back to where home is for you now – don't cut yourself off from God's extended family here on earth. It is like getting to know her relatives now – where as in a loving family she will always be welcome, loved and cared for and also helped through Sunday School and Confirmation come to that place of declaring for herself that she too knows God and is know by Him.]

*For this is eternal life that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you sent.*

Let us pray: