

Knowledge and Love

Season of Reconciliation/Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

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Texts: Deuteronomy 18:15-20

Psalm 111

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

Mark 1:21-28

We all know *those* people.

The people who just have to know everything,
and regularly demonstrate how much they know.

The Hermione Grangers of the classroom
who practically leap out of their seats,
hand in air, to answer every question

Or the Oscar Martinezes of the office
who feel the need to constantly correct co-workers,
beginning most sentences with, “actually...”

Or the Sheldon Coopers of the friend group
for whom it seems physically *painful* to allow inaccuracies to go unnoticed
You know who I’m talking about: the know-it-alls.

And, DANG, these people can be annoying. Am I right?

Especially if we’re on the receiving end of the correction.

However, if we’re honest with ourselves,

I suspect we all have a little know-it-all within us.

Some more than others, admittedly.

But the motivation isn’t always malicious!

Sometimes I just get so excited that I know the answer
that before you know it, before I can even raise my hand,
I’m shouting it out to the dismay of my classmates and professors.

It’s fun to know things.

There’s a reason why we find such joy in playing games like Jeopardy,
And who wants to be a millionaire.

It’s IMPORTANT to know things.

If you want to keep a budget,
it’s helpful if you can do basic math,
and add up all of your expenses.

Sometimes it may even seem *essential* to know things.

I learned the names:

Anthony Rizzo, Kris Bryant, Dexter Fowler

I learned the terms:

double play, pinch hitter, grounder.

I even memorized facts about my “favorite” player, Addison Russell.

I hung out with Cubs fans and confidently engaged in sports talk.

I looked so smart and felt even smarter!

...Until the conversation inevitably surpassed my knowledge level.

I was left awkwardly shuffling my feet,

Desperately trying to divert the conversation back to the stuff I *did* know.

This sort of arrogance is detrimental in a number of ways.

For one, it can kinda make you look like a jerk.

But I also think arrogance actually prevents us from learning more.

If I walk around assuming that there’s nothing left for me to learn,

then it’s likely that I won’t learn anything new.

Psalm 111:10 says, “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.”

I’ve always struggled to understand what “fear of the LORD” means.

I used to think that it meant recognizing God’s power,

and realizing that I could be wiped off the face of the earth

if God so chose to do so.

That may be a piece of it,

But I wonder if this fear could mean an awareness of one’s place in the universe.

A humility that comes with the recognition that human beings came from dust,

and to dust we shall return.

That we are finite,

beings bounded by time and space.

That God, on the other hand,

Is infinite,

all-present, all-powerful, all-knowing.

Flannery O’Conner, American author of short stories,

wrote, “To know oneself is, above all, to know what one lacks.

It is to measure oneself against Truth,

and not the other way around.

The first product of self-knowledge is humility . . .”

And we might say,

The first product of *any* kind of helpful knowledge is humility.

“Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.”

A few chapters later,
 In 1 Corinthians 13,
 Paul writes,

“If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels,
 but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.
 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge,
 and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains,
 but do not have love, I am nothing.”

What good is it, to know that Addison Russell hit 21 home runs
 and stole 5 bases in the 2016 season?

What good is it, to know that in Hebrew, the book of Jonah begins...
 “vayahi d’var adonai el Jonah,
 ven amitai, lemor. cum! Lech el ninveh, ha’ir ha’gdolah...”

What good is it, to be able answer the question,
 What is your only comfort in life and in death?
 With: That I am not my own,
 but belong—
 body and soul,
 in life and in death—
 to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

These things matter little, says Paul,
 unless they are accompanied by love.

There are two ways that I’m thinking about love here.
 Love is a demeanor,
 or an attitude of care toward those around us.

Debates about immigration,
 LGBTQ rights,
 Or feminism rarely go well if we devolve to name-calling and yelling.
 When we share knowledge,
 It is important to do so with humility and compassion.

Love is also an action.

Global warming and sex trafficking aren’t going to fix themselves
 if enough people simply acknowledge them as realities.

We must alter the way in which we interact with the earth
 and our fellow human beings.

It is not enough to just *know* the right things.

We must be willing to supplement our knowledge
 with love that works itself out in acts of peace, justice, and mercy.