

# Preaching from St. Stephen's Pulpit

St. Stephen Lutheran Church, Williamsburg, VA

May 12, 2024

---

## Made Known

[Readings](#)

[Bulletin](#)

Beloved by God, my siblings in Christ; grace to you and peace from God our Creator and our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

“I have made your name **known**...” (John 17:6a, NRSVue)

“Now they **know** that everything you have given me is from you” (John 17:7)

“they have received them and **know** in truth that I came from you” (John 17:8b)

Those are just the references to knowing and being known in our reading from today. If we expand beyond that to look at all the references in Christ's Farewell Discourse (John 14-17) we can also include:

“If you **know** me, you will **know** my Father also. From now on you do **know** him and have seen him.” (John 14:7)

“I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not **know** what the master is doing, but I have called you friends, because I have made **known** to you everything that I have heard from my Father.” (John 15:15)

“And this is eternal life, that they may **know** you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” (John 17:3)

“Righteous Father, the world does not **know** you, but I **know** you, and these **know** that you have sent me. I made your name **known** to them, and I will make it **known**, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them and I in them.” (John 17:25-26)

In fact, there are even more references to knowing and being known, the term occurs 92 times in John's Gospel. This should indicate that this is an important theme, one worth exploring! So let's examine the themes that commonly crop up with this “knowing” language.

This language of knowing and being known is most often used by Christ in reference to the relationship between the Father, Christ, and followers of the Way. Knowing Christ means knowing God (as much as limited humans can); and being known by Christ means being known by God too. This knowing language has to do with

relationships. Our relationship with God, with one another, and with the “world” (to use Johannine language).

This should come as no surprise to any who have encountered the teachings of Christ. Connectedness is fundamental to the teachings of Christ, and to our reality. Knowing anything, then, means knowing its connectedness to everything else. This is why we have the problem of unintended consequences. When we do not consider how things are connected, we are apt to cause grave and often negative consequences that can spread far through those overlooked connections. Christ calls us to know how we are connected; to God, to one another, and to the world.

Christ is inviting his followers to a life of communion. And a life of communion is an abundant and eternal one! It is a whole and complete life. It is the life we were created to live, and therefore, it is a righteous life. The priorities of this life of communion are vastly different to what the world’s priorities are. Hence Christ’s acknowledgement that “I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world” (John 17:14); followed by his prayer that God grant his disciples protection and sanctification in the truth.

Living communally means setting aside competition for the sake of cooperation. Living as we were created to live means forgiving more than we want to. It means prioritizing the needs of others over our own desires. And it requires a deep curiosity towards the world around us. A desire to know the people we encounter to know God better. A desire to know God better by exploring the unique perspectives and experiences that each of us carries.

But this work does not start with others or the world. Following the Way of Christ, the communal life for which we have been made, starts with knowing ourselves better...deeper. A process that most of us are hesitant to engage in. Why are we so hesitant? Because this process requires vulnerability and truth; two things we generally don’t enjoy.

Thomas Merton talks about the “True Self” and “false self.”<sup>1</sup> These are words he used to clarify Jesus’ teaching of dying to self or “losing ourselves to find ourselves.”<sup>2</sup> Merton rightly recognized that it was not the body that had to “die” but the “false self” that we do not need anyway. He taught that the True Self should not be thought of as anything different than *life itself*—but not my little life—the Big

---

<sup>1</sup> Merton, Thomas. *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New Directions: ©1961).

<sup>2</sup> *c.f.* Mark 8:35

Life. The philosopher John Duns Scotus said that the human person is not different or separate from *Being* itself. This is not the little being that you and I get attached to and take too seriously, but Universal Being, “the One in whom we live, and move, and have our being,” as Paul put it to the Athenians (Acts 17:28).

Knowing ourselves means confronting our “little” or “false” selves and doing what we can to let them go. Knowing ourselves means exploring our patterns and habits, and not just the patterns of our actions, but our thoughts and motivations too.

Knowing ourselves means taking a second look at our responses to people, experiences, situations, and the world in general.

When we know ourselves better, when we understand why we do the things we do...then we are free to change ourselves. When we see how our persistent patterns affect the people around us, and the world around us, we can begin to respond differently, perhaps even communally...righteously. Once we begin to see our connectedness, and how what we do, say, and think affects others (and the world), then we can work on living differently, walking the Way of Christ, the way of communion.

We can come to know who God is through exchanges of mutual knowing and loving. God’s basic method of communicating God’s self is not the “saved” individual, the rightly informed believer, or even a person with a career in ministry, but the journey and bonding process that God initiates in community: in marriages, families, tribes, nations, schools, organizations, and churches who are seeking to participate in God’s love, maybe without even consciously knowing it.

Community seems to be God’s strategy and God’s leaven inside the dough of creation. It is both the medium and the message. It is both the beginning and the goal: “May they all be one . . . so the world may believe it was you who sent me . . . that they may be one as we are one, with me in them and you in me” (see John 17:21, 23).

Julian of Norwich used the old English term “*oneing*” to describe what was happening between God and the soul. The divisions, dichotomies, and dualisms of the world can only be overcome by a communal consciousness at every level: personal, relational, social, political, cultural, in inter-religious dialogue, and spirituality in particular. Jesus prays, “that all may be one.” Julian explains this: “By myself I am nothing at all, but in general, I am in the *oneing* of love. For it is in this *oneing* that the life of all people exists.”<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, 9.

Ultimately, the Way of Christ means knowing...deeply knowing...knowing in mind body and soul...that we are already one. In God, in God's love...we are already one. Communal life is the only life. Knowing and being known is why we're here. Loving and being loved is the point of this life. It is circular, reciprocal. The more we know about God and neighbor the better we can love. The more we love God and neighbor the deeper we will know them. Amen.