

Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18
Ephesians 3:14-21
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When I was in Seminary it came time for all the Presbyterians in the school to start studying, really cramming, for four huge ordination exams. Those big exams that all Presbyterians in the PCUSA need to take and pass in order to be ordained for the ministries we have sensed a call to. This was two weeks of grueling work. We were tired. We were filling our brains with all kinds of facts about our confessions, about scripture, about the reformed tradition. We had the Book of Order open every night learning every numbered this and that, and we were tired. We took a study break one night and my friends and I, on our way to get a cup of coffee, encountered Donovan. Donovan was a good Southern Baptist and he knew what we were up to. He knew we were in their studying for days and nights, and he made a joke with us. He said, "You know in our tradition we don't have to be ordained to become a pastor of word and sacrament." And we joked back with Donovan, saying, "You know our denomination likes clergy that know some things." And Donovan responded with a big smile, "Well, you may know some things, but we know our Bible." We were both boasting a bit about the knowledge we all had based on our traditions, based on what we were called to do in Seminary, the knowledge we were filling up our brains with in order to pass the test, get through the exams, write the papers, and become the ministers that God was calling us to be. We were boasting about a knowledge that Paul spoke of in Corinthians. And surely that knowledge was puffing up our confidence to pass exams. We were stuffing up our heads, and in many ways, puffing up our egos.

Paul knew some things about this kind of knowledge. He, too, was rather puffed up at times, and he knew it. He was an expert in what he did, a religious scholar, a fine keeper of the law. In fact, in the Book of Philippians he said he was blameless in keeping the law. He knew his trade. He was a teacher. He made sure others knew their Jewish traditions, their Jewish law. He was an enforcer. And when some of the Jewish Christians began following Jesus Christ, believing Him to be the given Messiah of the living God, Paul set out to enforce the law even more strongly, pursuing them more strongly and with abandon, to bring those heretics to trial, sometimes to their death.

Everything changed for Paul one day. We recall his story as he traveled the road to Damascus to gather up more of these heretics, these Jews who had followed Christ, to bring them to trial. He encountered, in a flash of power and light, the power of Christ which knocked him off his horse, if he was riding one, and which blinded him for a while, and gave him a completely new kind of knowledge, the revolutionary kind of knowledge. This kind of knowledge was not rooted in the intellect.. This kind of knowledge is pure gift. It overwhelmed him, it transformed his life, and life was never the same again. He went from being rooted and grounded in things he knew to being rooted and grounded in love.

God's revelation is like that. It's rooted in love by giving us the experience from being the "knower" to the one being "known" -- to be known by an extravagant, boundless, accepting love that has accepted us before we were born, in our darkest hours, in our deepest sin, no matter what, from beginning to end. This was good news for Paul, for through the power of the Holy Spirit, he knew he belonged, he knew he was known. He knew that, in an instant, he was rescued from a life of fear and hatred. He knew, without a doubt, he was included in this liberating, reconciling life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Another thing about God's revelation is that it is not meant for one person alone. It's meant to be shared. It was good news for Paul, it was good news for the world, and he burned to share it. He received the invitation to go and share all of God's revelations. And he received more revelations that the Gentiles were included in this amazing love. This is the prayer to the Ephesians inspired by Paul's revelation, that we read today. He wanted to be with these Gentiles that he himself had excluded his entire life, these people considered unclean by their Jewish neighbors. And these Gentile Christians in Ephesus, who lived in a very powerful Roman city, in the middle of an Empire that worshipped not a living, eternal God, but frail humans that will die. These Gentile Christians knew that they were up against some hard times, being a minority in this kingdom, worshipping a different kind of king, a different kind of God. Paul was sent by Christ. He gladly went to tell them, "Don't worry. You belong. You are known. And as one who used to persecute, I know what you are going through. You are not alone in it. Do not be

afraid.” Paul was working to ground them not just in knowledge of Jesus Christ, but in knowledge that they are known, rooted and grounded by love.

I am wondering about us. What are we rooted and grounded in? You and I know some things. You and I have been to school, like our Seminary friends and I, doing our tasks that we were called to do, to read those books, to study for those exams, to write those papers, to use that God-given intellect to learn some things about the world. And as we are here today, we want to know more about God, perhaps. We have used our God given brain to acquire knowledge about this faith of ours, the mysteries of it. We go to Bible studies, we attend lectures, we hear sermons, we sing songs, we pay attention to the words in our worship. We have good results, rooting ourselves in more knowledge. Advanced degrees. Good jobs. Incomes for us and our families. These are all gifts. But how many of us come here filling our heads with knowledge, and hoping that in some way the knowledge will leap from our heads to our hearts. Some of us are here in despair or in grief. Some are here in joy. But do we feel alive in it? How is this knowledge going to move to our hearts, and convince us what Paul knew, that we are not alone in our despair, that we do not walk this earth alone.

Maybe we truly want to know what Paul knew, that we are radically loved, deeply known, and fully accepted, even at our worst. But, you know, Paul had major and dramatic revelations. Where is our burning flash of light that knocks us off our horse on our way to work one day? Or where is the burning bush that Moses saw? Where is God’s voice that Moses and Paul heard speak their very name? What about the visions and dreams the prophets of old had? Where are those for us, convincing us without a doubt that we belong and are known?

Friends, I hold these things in my hand. The holy scripture, the Bible, is the biggest gift of revelation to us every day. This living word. In this Bible there are stories of people like Paul, like Moses, like the prophets. Their lives continue to teach us, to preach to us, to reveal to us God’s living word to us. Christ is at work revealing Christ’s amazing love to us. And if that was true then, that God revealed God’s love through the stories of people’s word, it is true today. God delights in using God’s humans to reveal the love that is in store for us.

If we look around at the people in our lives, do we ever consider that God has a revelation and that kind of knowledge for us, through others, through our co-workers, our closest friends, our worst enemies, our family members, and even the person sitting next to you in the pew today. Think about that. There’s a Native American expression that is a guide to life that some of you may know that says, “Don’t judge a person until you walk two moons in their moccasins.” This is an invitation to get to know someone before we decide anything about anybody. It’s an invitation to stand in another person’s shoes, to take the time to pause and consider another person’s life and how God might be at work in that person’s life. It’s also an invitation to pause in our own moccasins. This is risky business. Do we expect to find God in other people? Do we expect to find God in our own stories? You know..... if we expect it we just might find it. What if we feel things we don’t want to feel? What if we experience an intimacy we have never known? Or, what if, like Paul we experience through a revelation an invitation to receive this transforming love and then go and tell the world?

One time I, when I was living on the west coast and with a Presbyterian Church, someone asked me, “So, what is God doing in your life today?” I was raised as a Missouri Synod Lutheran German, and I don’t know if you know what that means, but we kept everything inside and outside the church to a reverent whisper. It was a very private affair in my growing up. When someone asked me that question I was afraid. I thought, “What are they asking of me and what do they think God is up to in my life? What do they see that I do not?” That day I will never forget. The Holy Spirit that is working wonders in each of us, that Paul talks about in this prayer, was at work in my life. That Holy Spirit encourages us to pause in another person’s moccasins, in our own shoes, and consider what God is up to. How God in Jesus wants to reveal himself to us. This is what Paul revealed and understood in the revelation. On the road to Damascus he understood in a heartbeat that God had been walking in his moccasins with him since before he was born, and that Jesus Christ loved him anyway.

The Holy Spirit is rooting us and grounding us in this revelation kind of love. Many of us, sit in the same place Sunday after Sunday. Through my whole church going career, which is my whole life, my family and I always sat in the same pew, or in the general vicinity if someone else was there before we got there. I have often thought, and I think about it today, we know who is sitting around us maybe by face, maybe by their perfume. We might know their names during the meet and greet time, or passing of the peace time, we might know something about their jobs, we might know the names of their kids, but do we know them? Do we have the courage to pause and walk in that

person's moccasins for a while? Taking time to ask them maybe, "What is God doing in your life today?" Believing without a doubt that it is good things.

Friends, God is a relational God, like all God's revelations that are meant to be shared, we are meant to share them, because we are not meant to live life alone. Paul was rescued from a lonely fearful life of hatred, and persecuting other people into a life of community where he could not help but burn with joy to share what he knew... the revelation kind of knowledge that he was accepted. We are called to do the same, we are not meant to do life alone. And when we have the courage to let the Holy Spirit lift us up, give us the words, and help us to pause and walk in another's moccasins, the person sitting next to you perhaps, that's when we know true community. That's when we know how with abandon, Jesus loves us and accepts us. This was good news for Paul, good news for the gentile Christians in Ephesus, it's good news for us today. God is still revealing God's self to us. Jesus Christ is still rooting for us through the Holy Spirit and grounding us in that love. Today friends, know that you are known, and loved and accepted, no matter what, and receive the invitation to go and tell the world.

As we go out today, ask "What is God doing in your life today?" In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.