

Having a God who knows us fully and completely and continues to love us anyway is both incredible and sometimes overwhelming. Sometimes it's exactly the comfort that we need when we are having a hard time - God has known us fully, from the time we were knit in our mother's wombs, even now, even here, even when we feel alone and overwhelmed and angry or sad or grieving, God still knows us and loves us still. Sometimes it can seem a bit creepy, God knowing us so deeply, and sometimes that knowledge can make us afraid, can hit at some of the most tender and vulnerable places in ourselves - God really knows and loves me? God really knows me, even with this shame, this fear, this anger that's hard for me to even name for myself? Even here? Even now?

The answer to all those questions is absolutely a resounding yes, and it is crucially important to remember that God loves you. Each and every one of you. God made us in love and came into this world out of great love and indeed is love itself. God's love underlies each of us, and God's love is what will heal and save and bring justice and peace to each of us, in our own lives and in the greater world around us too.

Our Psalm today is a rather famous one, often cited as a way to bring comfort in God's knowing us - since God knows us so deeply, then God will never leave us, God will be faithful to God's promises to be our God, and we are God's people, God's beloved, the ones to whom God belongs and will never give up on. This image of being fearfully and wonderfully made brings up a sense of wonder and joy like we encounter with a newborn baby, the welcoming of new life into the world in a real and physical and deeply hopeful way. There are few times in life when I think we are more hopeful, than when we meet a new baby for the first time, and get to see the wonder of what life and love truly are reflected in those beautiful, little beloveds.

But as we think about knowledge, what it is to be known by God, we need to dive into this word of "knowing", because it's deeper than we realize. The best way I know how to describe this depth, bear with me, is through the two words for "know" in German - wissen and kennen. Wissen has to do

with straight fact knowledge, easily exchangeable facts like numbers and science - actually the German word for science has this word at its root - Wissenschaft. It's a head-knowing of concrete and important things. But kennen is more of a heart knowing, a personal and interactional knowing. If you say "Oh, I know this person", you would use the word "kennen". Kennen is centered on relationships, a knowing that comes from interactions and humanness.

In Psalm 139, when the author speaks of God knowing them, the word used in translation is kennen. God knows us in a personal and relational way. Perhaps that can alleviate some of the overwhelming nature of God knowing us - in our inmost parts, in discerning our thoughts and searching our paths. It's not a knowing for the sake of scrutiny or picking apart, but rather a knowing for relationship, a knowing for our hearts, a knowing out of love.

And in our Gospel text today, the word that Jesus uses in calling Nathanel, is also kennen. Nathanel asks, "where did you get to know me?". Jesus replies by mentioning the fig tree, but Nathanel begins to know Christ in a deeper way too, when he immediately responds with assurance that Jesus was the Son of God, the King of Israel.

Jesus' knowing Nathanel is deeply connected to the calling that Jesus gives to Philip earlier in this chapter. Philip knows Jesus from a simple encounter in which Jesus actively calls to him, saying "Follow me." Since Philip and Nathanel are from the same town, they likely already knew, kennen, each other, perhaps even had family and friends in common. It's from this place of knowing and relationship that Philip convinces Nathanel to come and see who he just met, who he has been called to follow.

Knowing Jesus Christ goes to a deeper level of our humanity. In this story of Philip encouraging his neighbor, Nathanel, to come along, he says simply, "come and see." There aren't words needed or sufficient to cover what it is to follow Jesus. In following Jesus, we start first with a belief, a belief that Jesus Christ is Lord, that God is real and alive and moving and working in our world, that God knows us and loves us. But following Jesus

is more than simply believing in Him - following Jesus is belief with meat on its bones - there's a strength and sturdiness and physical action element to it, rather than just keeping it in our heads. Philip knew this, and invited Nathanel into the physical experience "come and see", when following the calling of Jesus Christ.

Even now, even all these hundreds, thousands of years after Philip's invitation, Nathanel's delighted following, and Jesus' initial call to discipleship, Jesus still calls us to follow him. Jesus calls us to follow him, in this belief in action kind of way, even as he knows us on deep and vulnerable levels. Jesus is God made human, and knows exactly what it is to be human, to be known and loved by God, who knows our words before they are on our tongues, who is acquainted with all our ways.

God knows us in our inmost parts, the deepest places of who we are, the very fibers of our being, of what makes us who we are. God knows us and loves us. God knows you and loves you. And God calls you to live into that love - in worshipping God first, and deeply loving one another in all things. Because God first loved each of us, we are able to love one another, just as we are called to by God in Christ Jesus.

The more human way of knowing one another, the kennen way of knowing each other, is powerful. Connecting with others on this deep and human level of God-created love and knowing is what heals us, is what builds up community, is what following Jesus' calling is really all about.

When we hear in the greatest commandments that we are to love God above all else, it means that we are loving the one who formed us and knows us deeper than we even know ourselves. God knows that we are flawed and sinful and can erroneously be persuaded by lies and falsehoods and straight up evil in our world, and yet still chooses to know us. To give us grace and mercy. To show us the way, the truth, and the life of Christ Jesus who indeed is the Prince of Peace, the hope of nations, the savior of the world. Who came into being through God who loves, was born into the world of a human mother who said a radical yes to being the nurturer of God's love made human, and who remains still as the Spirit who comes

alongside of us, the Spirit of truth and righteousness. This God, our God, loved us so much that he gave up the life of his only Son, Jesus Christ, so that we may be free from the power of sin and death and darkness and temptation and all the things that separate us from His life-saving love. This God, our God, loves us so much that death did not defeat him, the cross did not destroy him, the betrayal of his own people to the point of torment and death did not overcome him, God rose again in love. This God, our God, rolled the stone away from the tomb and rose to new life in power and humble love. This God, our God, calls us to this life of radical love, of deeply knowing one another as our fellow people, our neighbors who we are called to love. Love does not look like storming mobs or violent rage. Love will never threaten the well-being of others, of our fellow beloved people, our neighbors that God loves and we are called to love too.

Love instead is healing. Love is patient and kind, not boastful or angry but indeed rejoices in the truth. Love is never giving up on the people around you. Love in the power of God is what rose Jesus out of that grave and into new and everlasting life. Love is God, and God is love. Love is what underlies being known, and has the power to save us all.

So dear friends, lean into the deep knowing that God has of you and rejoice in the love that has led you thus far. Lean into the calling of God to know one another, to be human together, and to live out the calling of love. Jesus is still actively calling us in this world, and we know both Jesus and our callings best when we are in relationship with one another, in Christian community. Through this knowing, this loving, this healing first given to us by God, we can begin to know, love, and heal this world that God made for us too. Thanks be to God, Amen.