

4th Sunday after Epiphany – B
Text – 1 Corinthians 8:2

If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know.

KNOWING AS WE OUGHT TO KNOW

It's been called the "information age." In today's world knowledge has replaced industry as the most valued possession or capability. iPods, iPhones, iTunes, they all revolve around making information, or knowledge, more portable. What we're looking at this morning has to do with the proper use of knowledge. What does it really mean to "know?"

It's not uncommon to run into someone who has a 'know it all' attitude. Encountering a person who's arrogant & aloof certainly isn't unheard of. Each of us has, in our own particular circumstances, fought to be 'right,' to be the one who was proven to have the correct answer. Yet, are any of those truly knowing as the Bible says we ought to know?

Clearly not! "If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know." In Paul's case he was talking about food offered to idols. At this point anyway, it's not something commonly heard of here in the United States. Yet the principles that Paul addresses the issue with can be applied to many other circumstances.

The circumstances in Corinth could be summarized in this manner:

Those who have knowledge, specifically that there's no God but One, see the food sacrificed to idols as simply food. It can neither help nor harm them. However, not everyone has this knowledge. For those weak in conscience this food is the food of idols. When one who is weak sees one who has knowledge eating this food he may be compelled to eat even though he believes it wrong. Such eating will defile his conscience & may lead him to perish. So, even though we may have superior knowledge, we are to love our brother & give up that which would cause him to stumble, even though our Christian liberty would allow us to eat.

St. Paul is pointing out the tension between love & knowledge. Knowledge can puff up, & fill with vanity. It can divide people, whereas love builds them up & brings people together. Therefore, the very person who thinks he knows something reveals that he does not know as he ought to. The apostle wrote in the book of Romans, "...by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment..."

Knowledge is not a bad thing; it just isn't the end goal. It's merely a tool to use. Being right is only a stop along the way. Just because someone is smart, just because they have knowledge, doesn't mean they've arrived. Paul is teaching the proper use, & purpose, of knowledge. He's teaching what really means to "know."

He wrote in Romans 15, "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak & not to please ourselves." If we don't use our knowledge to love others, than all our knowledge is false, counterfeit & useless, as if we know nothing at all. Here's an illustration.

"Twenty years ago, Joe drove a cab for a living. When he arrived at 2:30 AM, the building was dark except for a single light in a ground floor window. Under these circumstances, many drivers would just honk once or twice, wait a minute, & then drive away.

But Joe had seen too many impoverished people depending on taxis as their only means of transportation. Unless a situation smelled of danger, he always went to the door. This passenger might be someone who needs his assistance, he reasoned. So Joe walked to the door & knocked.

“Just a minute,” answered a frail, elderly voice. Joe could hear something being dragged across the floor, & after a long pause, the door opened. A small woman in her 80's stood before him. She was wearing a print dress & a pillbox hat with a veil pinned on it, like somebody out of a 1940's movie.

By her side was a small nylon suitcase. The apartment looked as if no one had lived in it for years. All the furniture was covered with sheets. There were no clocks on the walls; no knickknacks or utensils on the counters. In the corner was a cardboard box filled with photos & glassware, being left behind.

“Would you carry my bag out to the car?” she asked. Joe took the suitcase to the cab, & then returned to assist the woman. She took his arm & they walked slowly toward the curb. She kept thanking him for his kindness. “It’s nothing,” he said. “I just try to treat my passengers the way I’d want my mother treated.”

When they got in the cab, she gave Joe an address, & then asked, “Could you drive through downtown?” “It’s not the shortest way,” he answered quickly. “Oh, I don’t mind,” she said. “I’m in no hurry. I’m on my way to a hospice.” Joe looked in the rear-view mirror & saw her eyes were glistening.

“I don’t have any family left,” she continued. “The doctor says I don’t have very long.” At that, Joe quietly reached over & shut off the meter. “What route would you like me to take?” he asked, & for the next two hours, they drove through the city. She showed him the building where she’d once worked as an elevator operator.

They drove through the neighborhood where she & her husband had lived when they were newlyweds. She had Joe pull up in front of a furniture warehouse that had once been a ballroom where she’d gone dancing as a girl. Sometimes she’d ask him to

slow in front of a particular building or corner & would sit staring into the darkness, saying nothing.

As the first hint of sun was creasing the horizon, she suddenly said, "I'm tired. Let's go now." They drove in silence to the address she'd given him. It was a low building, like a small convalescent home, with a driveway that passed under a portico. Two orderlies came out to the cab as soon as Joe pulled up.

They were considerate & intent, watching her every move. They must have been expecting her. Joe opened the trunk & took the small suitcase to the door where the woman was already seated in a wheelchair. "How much do I owe you?" she asked, reaching into her purse. "Nothing," said Joe. "You have to make a living," she answered. "There are other passengers," he responded.

Almost without thinking, Joe bent & gave her a hug. She held onto him tightly. "You gave an old woman a little moment of joy," she said. "Thank you." Joe squeezed her hand, & then walked into the dim morning light. Behind him, a door shut. It was the sound of the closing of a life.

Joe didn't pick up another passenger that shift. He drove aimlessly lost in thought. For the rest of that day he could hardly talk. What if that woman had gotten an angry driver, or one who was impatient to end his shift? What if Joe's knowledge, that cab drivers often get crank calls, had caused him to honk once & then drive away?

PAUSE

How do we use the knowledge we have? Is its purpose only to feather our own nest, or protect ourselves from being hurt & taken advantage of? Do we think we're something special because we know the truth & others obviously do not? Have you

ever found yourself imagining that you know something, only to find out you didn't yet know as you ought to?

I pray that you have. And you should know that God was working all things together in order to create that opportunity for you. The realization that we do not yet know as we ought to know is key to our salvation. It provides an opportunity to turn back, from our self-centered ways, from knowledge only, to God & His other-centered ways.

[1 John 3:16](#) says, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers." John is saying that love is living for others. It is other-centered, which is quite the opposite of self-centered. The most proper use of knowledge is to serve God, who forgives our sins, & we serve Him by forgiving & serving those around us. Knowledge, which is a gift from God, is meant for loving each other with. It's that command to love, even our enemies, which keeps our pride in check. Wanting to be correct in my knowledge is balanced out by God's command to use it for my neighbor.

If I focus only on knowledge I lose my Lord's perspective. If I focus only on my service then I've surrendered the knowledge that my Savior has given me. Ideally, I temper knowledge with love for God, which then translates into love for my neighbor. If I try to ease the tension between the two then I'm giving in to one extreme or the other.

True knowledge always points me to the love our heavenly Father has shown us through Jesus. Yet, true knowledge of that never leaves me stranded there. A person who thinks they know something has not yet comprehended the spirit of the Christian

faith. Knowledge is proud that it has learned so much. Wisdom is humble because it has learned nothing more.

God gives me the liberty to love the weak because no matter what it costs me God will provide all that I need. He has overcome my failures & fears. He has given me knowledge of His love & forgiveness. He has sheltered me with His peace during the hardships & trials of life. Finally, it's not what we know that is the key, but rather, that Jesus knows us.

He doesn't allow His superior knowledge to leave us in the dust bin of ignorance. Instead, He stoops down to suffer with us. He releases us from the chains of self-centeredness. He provides healing & reconciliation to the relationships we've broken with our need to be right, rather than forgiven.

To accept that we sin by our own choice, yet to believe that Jesus paid the penalty, & consequently to love others even when they fail, that is the proper use of knowledge, & that is what it really means to know, as we ought to know. Most people will never remember exactly what we did, or what we said, but they will remember how they felt after we were done with them. As the well-known saying goes, "No cares how much you know, until they know how much you care." Jesus' taking on of human flesh, & His death on the cross, show us how much He cares. Yet, His Father's love didn't leave Him stranded there, in the grave.

Jesus was raised from the dead to live again, & through the power of God's Spirit, in our Baptism we have already been raised from the dead to live again. It's in that new resurrection life that all God's children live today so that we might love God through loving our neighbor.

Knowledge alone is nothing; knowledge combined with love of God in Christ
Jesus is everything. Amen.

The peace of God that surpasses all human understanding will guard your hearts
& your minds in the knowledge & the love that Jesus Christ has for each of you. Amen.