

## “Embrace the Unknowable Nature of God”

### 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

People have asked me what it is that we pastors learn at the Seminary. I always tell them that the most important thing that I learned is that I know nothing. The more that have I learned about God, the more I have realized that God is incomprehensible. And for this I give thanks. If you only believe the things about God that you understand in your mind, then the God that you believe in can only be as smart as you are. Learn to embrace the unknowable nature of God.

The other day I was thinking about a good friend of ours from my first church in Wisconsin. I am Facebook friends with her, and her only daughter who I baptized is now a senior in high school. I am feeling old. It was a long time ago, but I remember the hospital visits because, Kris, the mom, was in the hospital on bed rest for 10 or 11 days waiting for her baby to be born. They didn't know if it was going to be a boy or girl, and her and her husband had not yet chosen a boy's name.

So on a few of my pastoral visits, I was looking at the book of baby names she had next to the bed. I was being *really* helpful. Do you know that Zero, like the number zero, is a name for a boy? Could you imagine the self-esteem issues that kid would have?

Well, in this book, there were also several of my favorite names from history: Clovis and Pepin. Not only were Clovis and

Pepin great kings and warriors, but they were also two of the great champions of the Christian faith.

Now, my friend Kris was not going to name her child either Clovis or Pepin. And we have joked about this for years. I am definitely sending her a copy of this sermon, and I am sure I will get a response. What I distinctly remember about that conversation was Kris saying to me, "I feel so dumb. You know who all these people are, like Clovis and Pepin, and I don't know any of them."

I still remember our conversation. I also still remember the nurse coming in and almost kicking me out because we were being too loud. And I thought about today's Epistle lesson. "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." God did not bring us into this world to trumpet our own intellect or accomplishments. And we have no reason or right to do so, because everything that we possess in this temporary life is limited and imperfect. Besides, as St. Paul says: "If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know."

However, in coming to the realization that we don't know much, as God's people, we also understand that we know everything that we need to know, because we do know God and we know and have experienced His love for us. But it was not in going through college and the Seminary or studying Greek and Hebrew that has allowed me to know God. It was on November 3, 1968 that I came to know God. That was the day on which I was baptized. And since that day, I have continued to grow in my relationship with my Creator and Redeemer, and through His Word and Sacraments, He has continued to reveal Himself to me.

And I need Him to continue to reveal Himself to me,

because, as it is written in Hebrews chapter 5: “Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil” [Heb. 5:13-14].

We talked about this in last week’s Sunday morning Bible class as we have been studying the letter to the Hebrews. Just because we have received all that we need through the waters of Holy Baptism, this does not mean that we should then be satisfied with only understanding that which infants understand. Those small children washed in the water and the Word certainly do have faith – and their faith is just as complete as any adult. After all, we are called to have the faith of a little child – which means believing and trusting in something that we don’t fully understand.

However, having the faith of a little child does not mean that we can ignore the more mature teachings about things such as the Trinity or the Sacraments, which are really difficult to understand. They are “solid food.” There are even the grislier parts of the Word of God which are good for the mature to chew on. Luther talks about “wrestling with the Word of God.” This is a good thing.

The reason that our children do memory work, come to Sunday School, listen to sermons, and go through years of Confirmation is the same reason that we have Bible classes throughout the week and Sunday morning Bible class. These things are not done in order to puff someone up with knowledge, so they can go around and tell everyone who Clovis and Pepin are. God’s Word is taught throughout the week so that God’s love is further revealed. God’s love is revealed to you in the

forgiveness of your sins, in your Baptism (whatever day that was. And I encourage you to know that date. Celebrate it). God's love is revealed in the words of the Absolution (commanded by God, spoken to you), in the very body and blood of the Son of God (given and shed for you for the forgiveness of all your sins) God's love is revealed.

You do not have to know who Clovis and Pepin are in order to "be good Christians." I didn't know who they were until I took my Medieval Church History class at the Seminary. However, it is good for us to continue to learn and grow in our understanding of God and our understanding of how He has dealt with His people throughout history and how He deals with us today. And as we continue this learning process throughout our lives, it will be more and more clear that the fullness of God's majesty, glory, and grace is incomprehensible for our limited, imperfect minds.

But it is that incomprehensible, gift of grace from God; that peace of God which surpasses all human understanding; it is God's undeserved gift of love and forgiveness that allows us to know Him and approach to Him.

You can have a PH. D. in theology or church history and still not know God. We do not discover God by acquiring knowledge. God found you; God washed you clean of all your sin; He called you to faith and sustains you in faith through His Word – through His Son's broken body and shed blood. Learn to embrace the unknowable nature of God. It is His love for you, not your knowledge of Him which has brought you peace, hope, life, and salvation. Amen.