

"Know What You Know and Tell What You Know"

Text: John 3:1-17

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit - our triune God - be with you all. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christian:

Pontius Pilate once posed the rhetorical question to our Lord: ***"What is truth?"*** We routinely condemn Pilate in connection with his question, but not for the question itself. The question itself was solid – actually a truly great question. We rather condemn Pilate for his arrogance, and for the fact that he was in no way looking for an answer to his grand inquiry – *because he believed there was no answer*. That was a symptom of Pilate's real or basic problem, which was that he did not know the one true God. The irony is that he was asking the right question at the right time to the right person. In fact he was asking the question of *the one person in all of history* that could have given him an authoritative answer.

Which is exactly the point. There *is* such a thing as truth, but the moment mankind rejects the one, true God, man also sentences himself to an endless and hopeless search for absolute truth. Why? Because truth begins and ends with God. He is the source, the one and only authority. That which comes from God is truth; all that disagrees is falsehood and distortion. So also Scripture teaches us that ***"the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."***

The problem is further compounded by the fact that mankind has been given a limited intelligence and a certain measure of understanding as to how at least a part of God's creation works. The dilemma that man faces is knowing and accepting the limits of his God-given reason and understanding. Human being love to imagine that we know much more than we actually do. It's the old *"you don't know what you don't know"* carried to its ultimate extreme. There are certain things that we have been told about God, certain things that we have experienced relating to our God, but these are all "posters" of God, pictures that tell us a small part, but by no means all. God himself is beyond the scope or grasp of human understanding and appreciation. Man's reason and intellect are simply not up to the task of analyzing and comprehending Almighty God. He is beyond us, and yet at the same time he is within us. This paradox only serves to reemphasize the fact that the mind of man cannot fully fathom our Creator God – we cannot wrap our intellects around all that is God. There is therefore much more about God that we do *not* know and understand than what we *do* know. The triune nature of God, which we celebrate especially during this Sunday of the church year, is but one example.

This is one lesson we must learn well, for failure here will send us on paths that can only lead to destruction. This morning then we will look at this thing called truth and how it relates not only to the Trinity, but also to the precious saving gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and our Great Commission to share that ultimate truth. Beyond that there is this practical application: *We have been called not to understand all things, but to tell what we have been told by our God*. The text that forms the basis of our study is that well known section of John's Gospel, the Third Chapter:

ESV **John 3:1-17** *Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ² This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." ³ Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." ⁴ Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" ⁵ Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' ⁸ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." ⁹ Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" ¹⁰ Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹ Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. ¹² If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. ¹⁶ ¶ "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.*

So far the very words of God. You are blessed each time you hear the Word of God and treasure it. May God fill each of us with the truth that is above human manufacture or improvement. To this end we pray, ***"Sanctify us by Your Truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!"*** Amen.

Speaking of "truth," it is an immutable *truth* that achieving absolute truthfulness is actually a moment by moment pursuit, and we will forever struggle to get to the point where we are altogether honest. True honesty calls for policing our every thought, word, emotion, and action. It's an art-

form really, and what makes it so challenging is the delicate balance that is required. For example, a foundational principle of Christianity is that we freely acknowledge and confess our sins, which takes blunt honesty – not only with God, but also with ourselves and others. Yet together with that brutal honesty we are also supposed to employ restraint and denial – not with the truth but with our basic human emotions and inclinations. In other words, while a Christian needs to be honest enough to confess lustful or covetous thoughts, for example, we are not to employ the sort of mock honesty that gives up, declaring that *"that's just the way I am."* True honesty therefore confesses sin, even while refusing to yield to it, and refusing to allow it to define who and what we are.

Add to this whole dilemma the fact that absolute truth is dictated by God alone and that it does not always agree with human wisdom and understanding, and we are faced with a very long, tough row to hoe. That's why God's Word is so critically important for us. That is undoubtedly why the Psalmist pulled that Word of God close to his breast and declared it **"a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."** So also in that same 119th Psalm the inspired writer also proclaimed: **"Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD! ² Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with the whole heart!"** The Psalmist clearly recognized his own limitations, his own tendency toward foolishness, dishonesty, and error. God's Word was his only truth, his only sure guide. On our own we are capable only of great foolishness, ignorance, and deceit.

Man has God-given reason and intellect, but such things can only get so far. Human beings need to learn to subject reason and intellect to God's Word. It is there God visits us, teaches us, humbles us. There we find, for example, that there are truths that we simply cannot understand or comprehend. The fact that we cannot fully comprehend all of what the Bible teaches us does not make it untrue. Who hasn't puzzled, for example, at the truth of the Trinity - one God, three persons? This is the particular aspect of our God that we acknowledge on this Trinity Sunday, yet who here really understands that aspect of our God? And yet it is clearly taught throughout God's Word, including our text for this morning, so we unabashedly acknowledge it as truth. In our text we read that God the Father gave us his Son, and that the Holy Spirit alone can lead us to faith in that Son. To believe in God does not mean that we pretend to understand everything (or even *most* things) about God. It means that we accept God's Word as that which determines what is and is not true.

All of this helps to explain how human reason, when used *improperly*, can be a damning curse; but when rightly used can be one of the most beautiful, glorious and excellent gifts of God. Our text is a perfect example of the natural (and wrong) use of human reason. As familiar as this text is to many of us, we really cannot fully appreciate just what God is teaching us here until we

understand just what Jesus was attempting to overcome in Nicodemus during this clandestine, nocturnal meeting.

Nicodemus was both a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin (the Jewish ruling council). As such, Nicodemus was an all-star Jew. Of all the religious leaders, the Pharisees were regarded as the wisest. As to conduct and purity, the Pharisees were considered the most saintly. Among even these elite, Nicodemus stood out, being chosen to service as a government leader. Nicodemus was the upper crust of Jewish society. In government - a ruler, in conduct and reputation – beyond human reproach, and in knowledge - one of the wisest.

And yet Nicodemus was actually neither wise nor truthful at this point in his life. He seems to have come to Jesus as a peer, but Jesus immediately turned his world upside-down when he said, **"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."** The last thing the honorable Nicodemus expected to hear from Jesus was that he (Nicodemus) lacked something necessary to enter heaven. He was the best of the best - a leader, a scholar, a perfect gentleman who was above reproach.

So why did Jesus say what he did? What Jesus said was actually completely contrary to human reason – but that is precisely the lesson Nicodemus needed to learn. When it comes to the truth of God's Word, there logic and reason very often become our enemies. Had Jesus done anything else he would have effectively hardened all Pharisees like Nicodemus in their damning unbelief. The Pharisees believed that goodness earns heaven. Given their conduct, that *seemed* right to them, *felt* right. Jesus knew that no sinner could ever find the means to pay for even one sin. Every sinner needs a Savior. Nicodemus was willing to accept Jesus as a peer, but he was not yet willing to regard him as his Savior. With one bold stroke, Jesus teaches us for all time and eternity that there are not many paths to God. There is instead **"one God, and one Mediator between God and men. The man, Christ Jesus..."** ¹ **Timothy 2:5.** Not *many* paths, one path – through Christ Jesus. The Pharisees were not on that one path, for indeed their old ways had to die and they themselves had to be **"born again."**

Jesus tried to explain some of this simple truth to Nicodemus in our text. Bewildered, using his human intellect, his only response was, **"How can this be?"** Listen again to Jesus' reply: **Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?"** ¹¹ **Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony.** ¹² **If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?"** This must ever be our response to the world around us. You can fully expect that the unbelieving

world will condemn you for your lack of imagination, your faulty logic, and your blind, naïve, antiquated acceptance of what cannot be verified by earthly means. Yet we are called to be *witnesses*. Witnesses are supposed to tell what they know. That's it. They – *we* – are not required to comprehend every detail or to have plumbed the depths of all that we share. We are called to tell, in a simple and straightforward manner, exactly and only what we have been led to know. We cannot control how the message is received any more than Jesus could while he walked this earth. Again from our text: ***"Truly I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony."***

Learn well the lessons Jesus teaches us in this precious text. Human reason cannot grasp and comprehend the truths of the gospel. Only the Holy Spirit can create that saving faith in our hearts - the faith that trusts only in Jesus Christ for the righteousness that we could not provide. Do not be afraid, on the one hand, to abandon your human logic when it pulls you where God's Word does not go, and, on the other hand, do not be afraid to boldly share what you *do* know, for the only thing that you can know for certain is what that One Source of all truth has told you in his Word.

And then don't forget to rejoice in the sweet simplicity of the gospel message in this text. Jesus did not come to condemn, he came to save. Whoever believes in him will be saved. What a sublime blessing to be reminded that, in the end, it is just that simple.

God grant us continued confidence in ***"what we know"*** - the illogical foolishness that salvation is found in Jesus Christ alone, and that forgiveness is declared or credited to us not by what we do, but through faith in what Jesus has already done for us, together with the courage to simply tell what we know. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Isaiah 6:1-8** In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" ⁴ And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. ⁵ And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" ⁶ ¶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷ And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for." ⁸ And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me."

^{ESV} **Acts 2:14a, 22-36** But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: ²² ¶ "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know-- ²³ this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. ²⁴ God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. ²⁵ For David says concerning him, "'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; ²⁶ therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. ²⁷ For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. ²⁸ You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.'" ²⁹ ¶ "Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰ Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, ³¹ he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. ³² This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. ³³ Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. ³⁴ For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, "'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, ³⁵ until I make your enemies your footstool.'" ³⁶ Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: www.bismarcklutheran.org

Michael McEnroe, President

Eileen McEnroe, Organist

Michael Roehl, Pastor

Suzannah Miller, Organist

Trinity Sunday – May 31, 2015

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn - 243 (Red Hymnal)

"Oh that I Had a Thousand Voices"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson: (Isaiah 6:1-8) On this Trinity Sunday we focus first of all on the majesty and holiness of our God. The reaction of Isaiah in this reading to finding himself in the presence of the God of heaven and earth is both natural and commendable. All creation ought to stand in awe of our God. Note here too how the triune nature of our God is expressed in the angel's three-fold "Holy, Holy, Holy."

Psalm 100 (Supplement page 36) (Brown Hymnal)

The Second Lesson: (Acts 2:14a, 22-36) Trinity Sunday follows Pentecost Sunday. In this reading we find evidence of the greatest of the Pentecost gifts: spiritual wisdom, understanding, and insight – as well as courage to share those truths with the world. We also note on this Trinity Sunday how once again all three persons of the Godhead are here mentioned, which again validates our belief in the Triune nature or character of our God.

The Confession of Faith -

The Athanasian Creed – Read Responsively. (See Bulletin Insert)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 245 (Red Hymnal)

"God Loved the World So that He Gave"

The Sermon – Text: John 3:1-17 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Know What You Know and Tell What You Know"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn -246 (Red Hymnal)

"Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty"

The Offering

The Prayer followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn -244 (Red Hymnal)

"Glory Be to God the Father"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance - Last Sunday (52) Average (50)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Coffee/Fellowship Time
	-11:15 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship
	-11:15 a.m.	– Coffee/Fellowship Time

CLC News – Teacher Quinn Sprengeler has returned the call to Gethsemane School of Spokane. Immanuel of Mankato has called Mr. Matthew Kranz to teach 5th-6th grades in their school.

Youth Conference '15 – The deadline to apply for scholarships to fund this year's Youth Conference is tomorrow (June 1st). There is scholarship money available to significantly reduce the cost. Applying for a scholarship is not hard--details are on the website. See scholarship details and other conference info at www.youthconference.info

The Lutheran Spokesman – Subscriptions to the Lutheran Spokesman are also now due. Cost is \$15 per year and checks should be made to St. Paul Lutheran Church, with a note "Lutheran Spokesman." Spokesman payments can be included with the weekly offering. **Please note:** If you want your subscription renewed, please check the appropriate box on the sign-up sheet on the mailbox table. If you are a new subscriber, please include a mailing address as copies of the Spokesman are now direct mailed to your home.

Church Council Meeting – Church Council members are reminded of the meeting scheduled for this morning during the fellowship/coffee time.