

"A Little Knowledge"

Text: John 7:40-53

From Psalm 100: ***"Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. ⁴ Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! ⁵ For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations."*** Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

My guess is that if I were to begin a sentence with: *"A little knowledge is..."* most would finish it with: *"a dangerous thing."* That's the expression.

Nor is it a particularly nice expression. It's usually used to put someone down, to put someone "in their place." This morning we are going to examine that saying with a bit more charity or sobriety than is usually associated with those words. We will look at how, when it comes to God's Word, that simple saying can be either absolutely right or tragically wrong. The God-inspired words that will guide our thoughts this morning are found in the Gospel of John, the Seventh Chapter:

ESV John 7:40-53 *When they heard these words, some of the people said... "This is the Christ." But some said, "Is the Christ to come from Galilee? ⁴² Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" ⁴³ So there was a division among the people over him. ⁴⁴ Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him. ⁴⁵ ¶ The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, "Why did you not bring him?" ⁴⁶ The officers answered, "No one ever spoke like this man!" ⁴⁷ The Pharisees answered them, "Have you also been deceived? ⁴⁸ Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? ⁴⁹ But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed." ⁵⁰ Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them, ⁵¹ "Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?" ⁵² They replied, "Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee." ⁵³ They went each to his own house.*

These are the very words of our God – gifted to man to bring about our rebirth and preservation. Having already used the power of his Word to bring about our rebirth or conversion, we now ask that our God would use that same power to increase our wisdom and understanding, and to

preserve us in that saving faith until he calls us home. So also we pray: ***"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth."*** Amen.

While it may well be true that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, whole bus-loads of knowledge can be just as deadly. No one is therefore immune from, or "above," the warnings of our text. Foolishness comes in all shapes and sizes. Even today the majority of the most highly educated men and women in the world believe that their ancestors were monkeys, and that life began from, well, dead stuff. This remains, to me, a position or belief that defies logic, common sense, and the evidence that is all around us. One of the most basic rules of science is the Law of Biogenesis. Simply stated, life begets life. In other words, the same scientists that believe that life can only come from other life, also believe that *all life* actually began from non-life. And they apparently have no problem with this obvious contradiction. The lesson here is that if modern man can be so wrong about something so basic, it ought not surprise us that men living a couple thousand years ago were also mistaken about a few things. In fact if modern man can actually deny the very existence of the Creator God, it shouldn't surprise us that ancient man couldn't recognize the Son of God when he was standing right in front of them.

And that's just what they did, isn't it? Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Savior of the world, was standing right there in front of them and they failed to recognize him. More accurately, they *refused* to recognize him. How? Why? Because, at least in their case, a little knowledge was indeed a very dangerous thing.

It's actually quite startling how the highly educated Jewish leaders rationalized their rejection of Jesus - fascinating how they justified their denial in their own minds. This man was clearly saying and doing things of which no ordinary man was capable, and yet they adamantly refused to admit that he was anything but a deceiver. What is more, they publicly ridiculed anyone who pointed out even the basic facts concerning Jesus. As the Jewish leaders struggled to explain away the solid evidence Jesus presented to them, they demonstrated the same silliness we see today in the evolutionists and atheists. Yet if you read carefully they never actually addressed the question, did they? Sound familiar? The Godless do the same today. Rather than allow the evidence to persuade them, they condescendingly attacked those who did. ***The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, "Why did you not bring him?" ⁴⁶ The officers answered, "No one ever spoke like this man!" ⁴⁷ The Pharisees answered them, "Have you also been deceived? ⁴⁸ Have any of***

the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? ⁴⁹ But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed." Such is the nature of unbelief. It is fully capable of blocking out even irrefutable evidence if that is what is necessary to justify their unbelief. Make no mistake. Unbelief is, in large part, a choice. A tragic, damning choice.

In our text it was fascinating to watch the Jewish leaders struggle with the facts. Did you catch their basic justification for refusing to believe that Jesus was who he said he was? He was a Galilean. Why should that have made any difference? Was it just some petty prejudice on their part? Actually, no, for here is where the "little knowledge" part comes in. The Jews knew from Micah 5:2 that the Savior was going to come from David's line and that he would be born in Bethlehem. **"But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days."** These men knew their Old Testament Scriptures. We are told that many memorized entire books and could recite them at will. Remember how Herod inquired of these same men, when questioned by the Magi as to the birthplace of the Messiah, and how those Jewish scholars were able not only to give Herod a Scriptural answer, but Herod believed and acted on that information.

The problem was that Galilee was not part of the territory ceded to the Tribe of Judah, and the Prophet Micah had clearly foretold that the Savior would be born in Bethlehem, a city of Judah. Nazareth, the city where Jesus was raised, lay far to the north and was part of the territory given to the Tribe of Zebulun. It is reasonable to assume that Jesus had a Galilean accent. The Jewish leaders used this "knowledge" to reject Jesus as the Messiah. End of discussion. Unbelief is not only blind, it is also very stubborn.

Part of the problem we have in understanding this line of reasoning today is the fact that we don't really understand the general perception of Galilee in general, and the City of Nazareth in particular, in Jesus' day. We today associate Jesus with Nazareth, and therefore the city takes on a certain majesty it didn't otherwise possess. The Jews of Jesus' day just did not believe that anything good could come out of the region of Galilee. One of Jesus' own Apostles agreed. Remember how Nathanael, before he was first introduced to Jesus, said to his brother Philip, **"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"** What did his brother reply? **"Come and see."**

That was the key, wasn't it? That was where the religious elites of Jesus' day went wrong. It's where the educated of today go wrong. They refuse to go to God's Word to find their answers. For the simple men who were

invited to follow Jesus the question about Jesus' hometown and lineage was easily answered. The scribes and Pharisees refused to do that. They were content with their "little knowledge" because it was what they wanted to believe. Their misgivings could have – would have – been easily answered by a visit and a question: **"Jesus, the Prophet Micah told us to look for a man from Bethlehem. How can you be that man when you are a Galilean?"** Simple question, and Jesus would undoubtedly have given them a simple answer: **"I was born in Bethlehem and moved first to Egypt and then to Galilee."** The Jewish leaders would undoubtedly have also been familiar with Hosea 11:1, **"Out of Egypt I called My son."** Matthew reveals to us that this too was a prophecy about Jesus, but the Jews didn't want to hear it. In Matthew we are also taught that there were well-known prophecies that foretold that the Messiah **"shall be called a Nazarene."** The bottom line is that unbelievers just needed any old reason to "justify" their unbelief, and they were perfectly content to dismiss Jesus based on their "little knowledge" of one passage.

You and I today face very similar temptations which can actually look rather appealing at times. On the one hand we are tempted towards spiritual laziness – which we justify on the basis of **"All I need is simple faith in Jesus"** and **"The more I learn, the more questions I have – so it is less confusing to remain ignorant."** Sound familiar? We are also tempted, on the other hand, to assume too much from the little knowledge we do possess. One of the expressions that my family probably get tired of hearing was that **"we don't know what we don't know."**

Here again great balance is needed if we are to appreciate both the danger and the joy of the knowledge that God has given us – and continues to offer us through the study of his Word.

So what then are the specific dangers that young and old alike face in the days and years to come in modern-day America? What are our specific dangers when it comes to "a little knowledge"?

We live in the information age where doubts and questions spread with shocking speed to all corners of the planet. These errors need to be addressed, both in your own heart and mind, and in society. A thorough understanding of God's Word will therefore not only protect each individual Christian from faith-destroying error, it will help to equip every single Christian in his or her calling to **"give a reason for the hope that is in us."** Each one of us therefore has an equally tremendous opportunity to serve as a solid spokesman for God's Word

in an era of rampant skepticism, misinformation, and uncertainty. How can we serve our Lord faithfully if we do not know, and how can we know if we do not study, and where can we learn the truth but from his Word? A little knowledge can be a dangerous thing, but knowing little or nothing about God's Word can have catastrophic consequences, both for us and for those who do not know their Lord. If too little knowledge was a dangerous thing for the scribes and Pharisees in Jesus' day, it certainly poses the same danger for us today.

So, the saying still applies to each one of us today. Yet, in another sense, this same saying is also tragically wrong. In other words, "a little knowledge" can also be a most blessed and joyful thing. How so? Saving faith is not a matter of how much we know; it is a matter of what we believe. Saving faith is not complex; it is amazing in its simplicity.

Do you recall how earlier we said that the scribes and Pharisees refused to just go to Jesus and ask him about the fact that he was from Nazareth. One actually did go – Nicodemus, the same Nicodemus mentioned in our text. To this man Jesus summarized the "little knowledge" that creates saving faith and thereby provides eternal life: ***"God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."*** There's the proof that, in the case of Jesus, even just a little of the right sort of knowledge can be the most incredible, life-saving, life-changing thing anyone will ever hear. Whoever believes in Jesus will be saved.

While there is much to learn in God's Word, thanks be to God for the profound simplicity of the Christian faith. Our sins have been erased from God's sight forever. Jesus did that for us. Full and complete salvation is ours because of what Jesus did, not because of what we now do or don't do. No one can change that simple fact, and it is through faith or trust in that simple fact alone that we are saved – faith that has also been freely and undeservedly given to us by the Holy Spirit. That means that the very same heaven that *we* should have earned by perfect obedience to our God is now ours because of *Jesus'* perfect obedience. We failed, Jesus succeeded. We sinned, Jesus paid for our sins. We ruined our relationship with our God, Jesus restored that relationship.

These are facts. Do not be afraid to let these facts fill your heart with all of the joy and peace and relief our God intended this simple message to provide you. That is exactly why Jesus did what he did for you. That is why he died to save you. Thanks be to God for the "little knowledge" that brings us eternal life, and for the simplicity of that message.

And now we ask one other thing of our God this morning. We ask him to help us to grow daily in the knowledge of his Word that not only we might be strengthened, protected, and preserved in that simple, saving faith, but that we too might be fully, perfectly equipped not only to share with others that simple reason for the Christian hope that is in us, but to address also the misinformation that fills their world. *"Equip us for our great calling, O Holy Spirit."* Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Jeremiah 28:5-9** Then the prophet Jeremiah spoke to Hananiah the prophet in the presence of the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the LORD, ⁶ and the prophet Jeremiah said, "Amen! May the LORD do so; may the LORD make the words that you have prophesied come true, and bring back to this place from Babylon the vessels of the house of the LORD, and all the exiles. ⁷ Yet hear now this word that I speak in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people. ⁸ The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times prophesied war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great kingdoms. ⁹ As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes to pass, then it will be known that the LORD has truly sent the prophet."

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 8:1-13** Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that "all of us possess knowledge." This "knowledge" puffs up, but love builds up. ² If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. ³ But if anyone loves God, he is known by God. ⁴ ¶ Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "an idol has no real existence," and that "there is no God but one." ⁵ For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth--as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"-- ⁶ yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. ⁷ ¶ However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. ⁸ Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. ⁹ But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰ For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? ¹¹ And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. ¹² Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. ¹³ Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost – June 28, 2020

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn –5 (Red Hymnal)

"Lord, Open Thou My Heart to Hear"

The Order of Service – Hymnal page 15ff. (Red Hymnal)

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

The Old Testament Lesson: (Jeremiah 28:5-9) God had sent the Prophet Jeremiah to Judah to foretell the destruction of Jerusalem and of the impending Babylonian captivity. The people didn't like what they heard and rejected both Jeremiah and his message. A false prophet, Hananiah, then began to tell the people what they wanted to hear, and the people predictably flocked to him, embraced his message. They also used the false hope that his word offered to calm their fears. Our first reading represents Jeremiah's response to their foolishness.

The Epistle Lesson: (1 Corinthians 8:1-13) Continuing with our general theme this morning, in our second reading Paul addresses a problem in Corinth. They had a disagreement in the congregation about buying and eating meat from animals that had been sacrificed in pagan temples. Both sides evidently believed they were wiser or more knowledgeable than the other. Paul's basic message to them was that knowledge has to be based on fact. It also has to be tempered with loving concern for those around us.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – (Hymnal page 22)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 237 (Red Hymnal)

"All Glory Be to God on High"

The Sermon – Text: John 7:40-53 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"A Little Knowledge"

The Offertory – Page 22 (Red Hymnal)

The Prayers of the Day, Followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 427 (Stanzas 1-3) (Red Hymnal)

"How Firm a Foundation, Ye Saints of the Lord"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Red Hymnal page 24ff)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis (Red Hymnal page 30)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 427 (Stanza 7) (Red Hymnal)

"How Firm a Foundation, Ye Saints of the Lord"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time.

To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune – In humble obedience to God's Word, we practice "Fellowship Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others (not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

Attendance – Sunday (31) Average (40)

This Week at St. Paul:

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| Today | -10:00 a.m. | – Worship Service w/communion |
| | -11:15 a.m. | – Fellowship hour |
| Wednesday | -6:00 p.m. | – Confirmation Class |
| Next Sunday | -10:00 a.m. | – Worship Service |
| | -11:00 a.m. | – Fellowship hour |

CLC News – St Luke's of Lemmon has called Pastor Richard Kanzenbach. The full minutes from the recent CLC Coordinating Conference are available online here: tinyurl.com/2020springcc

Communion Notes – This morning we resume the public celebration of the Lord's Supper. The Church Council has established the following guidelines: Non-family communicants will generally be spaced a bit more widely – typically 3 per side at the communion rail. (Please follow the directions of the usher.) For the time being, only individual cups will be offered. Each communicant should take a cup when the tray passes. The Pastor will continue to place the communion wafer into the communicant's hand, in accord with our regular custom.

In Our Prayers – Judy Weber remains hospitalized over the weekend for tests and observation. Please keep her in your prayers.

ILHS Graduation – Immanuel High School will hold its graduation on Saturday, August 1st, at 10:30 a.m. Congratulations to St Paul member Grace Meyer, who is part of the 2020 graduating class! Attendance is restricted, but you can watch the event on the ILC website at ilc.edu