

Sermon preached at Gisborne, 31 May, 2020

O God, open our hearts and minds and souls to hear your word as if for the first time. Help us experience the surprise and joy anew that your presence in the word can bring us.

Acts 2:1-21; John 7:37-39; John 17:1-11

Are you living the eternal life? – Part 2

During the lockdown, I was able to cook meals more often than before. Since the ingredients were minimal, I had to be creative. So I watched food channels on YouTube in search of simple but original recipes. While watching different cooking styles and meals, I was able to identify one crucial thing that applied to any superb cooking. Whether they were famous chefs or ordinary people, they faithfully kept basic rules. For example, they used fresh quality ingredients; they knew about the ingredients inside out. They also knew how to control the strength of fire that would help the ingredients produce the best flavours. And they used knives well. Lastly, they loved cooking and seeing people enjoy their cooking. Best of all, if they could tell the stories of the food, it was unforgettable. After leaving the table, people may remember the meal with the stories. I thought that living the eternal life is not different from these masters' cooking.

We have basic principles or the recipe for living the eternal life. They are simple enough to apply to any life situations. The great recipe is **'to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom God has sent'** (John 17:3). Last week, we thought about who Jesus was through the parable of the Good Samaritan. We learned that Jesus was the Good Samaritan in the parable who came to rescue the half-dead man, that is us, from dying in our sin. Today, it is about to know Jesus and to believe in Jesus Christ. ¹

Knowing Jesus Christ

When we say that we know certain people, it may mean that we know their names, families, schools, characters and so on. But in scripture, knowing someone is quite different from what we understand. The word 'know'- *ada* (Hebrew)/*ginōskō* (Greek)² is to describe the relationship between a man and his wife that produces a child. For example, in Genesis 4:1, it reads, 'Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have produced a man with the help of the Lord."' So knowing someone is about intimacy. That is, 'knowing Jesus' is speaking of intimacy with him. Jesus expresses it to the extreme when he says, "those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day."³ In the 2nd century, Christians were accused of a variety of crimes, and one of them was cannibalism. It was from a misunderstanding of eucharistic 'body and blood' imagery, or of a mistake in the identification of real cannibals. Now we know that the Eucharist or the Lord's supper is in central to the Christian life. During the Lord's supper, we spiritually experience becoming one body of Christ. The Lord's supper helps us confirm this intimate relationship with Jesus over again. Becoming one body means extreme intimacy. Yet, this intimacy needs to be continuing even after we left the Lord's table.

Believers who lack this intimacy with Jesus Christ is to miss the most important part of what Jesus provided. For example, if we received forgiveness through Jesus and then continue without an intimate, personal, close relationship with God, we are missing the real purpose of salvation.⁴ That is, we may often be caught up with doubts, questions, insecurity, and most of all, confusion of our identity in Christ. All these things become

¹ In John 17:3 When Jesus says, "And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

² γινώσκω *ginōskō* know; understand*

³ John 6:54

⁴ John 3:16

bondage that keeps us in our self-made prison. It is because we aren't hearing either that knowing God is the real goal in this life or that it's even attainable through Jesus Christ. But reading and contemplating the word of God helps us keep this intimate relationship with God. It helps us know that we know the truth, and the truth will make us free.⁵

Jesus often says that he and the Father is one. "I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me."⁶ That is, Jesus has been maintaining an intimate relationship with God always. In the end, his ministry was about doing the will of God no more, no less. As such, for the apostle Paul, 'to know God' means to serve him while 'to be known by God' means to be elected, loved, and accepted by God.⁷ So knowing Jesus is often rendered as believing in Jesus. In short, our faith journey is about to know Jesus and to know God.

Believing in Jesus Christ

Once we know who Jesus is, believing in Him comes naturally. If we fall in love with someone, what we would do? I read an article in that people commemorated the king of Rock 'n' Roll- Elvis Presley's 85th birthday with four days of live music and fan celebrations. According to the local Graceland paper, Memphis, Tennessee, numerous events were scheduled for January 8 -11, 2020. It included the annual Elvis Birthday Proclamation Ceremony on 8 January.⁸ For those who love Elvis, he is still alive. But falling in love with Jesus is different from falling in rock stars. Elvis only lives in people's memories, but our Lord is living in us as a living being. On top of this, the Holy Spirit, who listens to God always is leading us to life that God wants us to live. So whether we like it or not, we are being led to a particular direction of life. During the course of this guided life, we become to know what God loves and what God hates. We can learn to do according to the will of God as if Jesus did. In short, Jesus' story becomes ours and his identity becomes our identities.

In the Storytime, we heard a story of the Prince and the Pauper. The question was that 'what made the prince endure the hardship as a pauper?' What's your answer? One of the possible answers is that his identity as a prince has helped him to endure the hardship of the pauper's life. But Edward the prince didn't keep it all by himself. There was a person – a soldier and nobleman Miles Hendon who became the protector of Edward. In addition, the Great Seal of England that Edward was able to keep safely proved his true identity as an heir of the king. Like the prince in the story, we are not alone either. We have the protector and guide – the Holy Spirit. Today we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit who is like the soldier and nobleman Miles Hendon. The work of the Holy Spirit is to guide us into all the truth; for the spirit will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.⁹ We have the Great Seal of Heaven too – the bible. They help us to keep our identity as Jesus' brothers and sisters. In the end, we have been asked to do the work of God through knowing Jesus and through knowing God. Indeed, this entire process is living the eternal life that begins here and now. May God allows us to do the work of God so that we can continually proclaim the eternal life in Christ, for which the Holy Spirit has come. Amen.

⁵ John 8:31-32

⁶ John 5:10

⁷ Rom 8:29; 11:2; Phil 3:12; 2 Tim 2:19; Amos 3:2

⁸ <https://www.localmemphis.com/article/news/graceland-commemorates-elvis-85th-birthday-with-four-days-of-one-of-a-kind-events-live-music-and-fan-celebrations/522-fa2b1d54-8b60-4b97-a2a0-75b3b375962a> Retrieved on 30 May, 2020

⁹ John 16:3