

Sermon John 6:35, 41-51
What Do You Know?
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Grace Lutheran Church

An expression I heard often

**When we lived in the southern portion of the country is
“Well, what do you know!”**

**And admittedly, the phrase is probably not foreign to Midwesterners,
But is certainly proclaimed without the drawn-out vowels.**

**It was most often used when one was surprised
By something they had just heard.**

**“Well what do you know! The (insert favorite team) won!”
“Those two are getting married? Well what do you know?”
And one of my favorites
Upon sitting down in a restaurant lately,
“Well, what do you know! Kids eat free on Mondays!”**

**It is a fascinating expression, really,
Because it incorporates a variety of feelings:
Disbelief, surprise, excitement,
Sometimes sarcasm, and a bit of rib poking.**

**If we take the expression literally for a moment
Then we see that it tacitly precedes
Every measurement of knowledge like tests and exams.**

**It is necessarily what an End of Grade exam asks
When put down on the desk in front of a student,
“The bar” of an aspiring lawyer,**

A licensing board of a surgical resident.
The FAA of a commercial pilot applicant.
In those latter cases, I suspect we all want that question
To be answered fully, and well, by the person being asked.

It is important that *we* know
That our lawyers, doctors, and pilots *know*
A great deal about their craft.

But, aren't there times when we've seen the opposite be true?
Isn't another expression we've heard equally valid sometimes?
The somewhat ominous phrase,
"I/We/They know too much?"

Someone knows enough to be dangerous?
Someone knows enough to defame, extort, corrupt or bribe?

With surprise and delight on one side
And a degree of ominous danger on the other,
It makes us wonder if there is some magical middle ground
Of knowing exactly what we need and nothing else.

But I suspect there is something even more hazardous
Than knowing too much,
And that is *thinking* we know more than we really do.
For nothing more swiftly lands one's foot
Into one's mouth.

I wonder if that is what is happening here in the Gospel of John?

This week's lection comes right on the heels of last week's story –
The editors even choosing to repeat Jesus' words in verse 35
To cement our foundation *in* those words.

Here, the Jews think they know exactly who Jesus is
Because they knew where he came from.
They knew who he was, they knew his trade,
They knew who his parents and family were.

One could easily imagine the hint of disdain in their voices,
“Well what do you know...here comes Jesus!
And what do you know...he’s talking about bread again!”

What they *thought* they knew
Was that Jesus was a simple man from a country village
And that he couldn’t possibly be or do
The things he says he was and was doing.

And from this theologically abundant text emerges for me
Just one simple question this week:
What do I think I know?
What do we think we know?

It’s enough to give us pause
As we consider weighing our intellect against our humility.

What do we think we know about faith? Life? Love?
Religion? Justice? Peace? Equality?

Do we know enough to be surprised when we learn something new?
Or do we know so much that we beat other’s brows with it?

What do we think we know about Jesus?
Do we think we know him so well
That we forget to listen to what he’s saying?

**Do we think we know how to do and be the church so well
That we neglect what might be new or different?
That we forget about those who may not know
How “to church” yet?**

**Do we think we know all there is to know
About the bread of life from heaven,
And rest so proudly on our great mastery of the mystery,
That we forget to share it with others?**

**Do we think we know everything there is to know about the cross,
That we forget to follow it?**

**“Well, what do you know?” can quickly become
Less of a humorous expression of surprise
And more of an indictment of hubris.**

**But the Good News also abundantly clear in Jesus’ words in John
Is that it is not our calling or our job
To know everything there is to know
About the discipleship life,
About a life steeped in the grace of God.**

**All that is invited of us to know, to deeply seat not only in our minds
But more importantly in our hearts,
Is that we walk by faith, through belief.
Not by sight, or knowledge, or gut instinct,
Or sheer power of will,
Or the contents of our minds.**

We walk forward together into the unknowns of the world
With hearts and minds washed cleaned in the waters of baptism
And nourished by Christ's own self,
The very bread of heaven.

“Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life,”
As Karoline Lewis of Luther Seminary reminds us,
“Was never meant to be a word of *condemnation*
but a word of *commendation*.
Not a word of privatization
but a word of promise.
Not a word of condition and uncertainty
but a word of absolute confidence
in our God who holds our life.”

When it comes to the Good News of God,
What do you know?
How do you know?
Even why do you know?
Are all answered by its remaining interrogative sibling:
“Who...who do you know?”

We know Jesus, the bread of life from heaven,
Who comes as gift from God to all of creation.

But perhaps even more importantly this day,
We hear again of the one who knows us,
The one who knows and loves you without ration.

Jesus loves me, this I know.
Amen.