



# FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

## “Knowing and Loving”

Scripture Lessons: Psalm 139:1-18; John 3:1-21

*This sermon was preached by Dr. L. Holton Siegling, Jr. on Sunday, August 15, 2021  
at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.*

John 3:1-21

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, ‘Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.’ Jesus answered him, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.’ Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?’ Jesus answered, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, “You must be born from above.” The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So, it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.’ Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can these things be?’ Jesus answered him, ‘Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?’

‘Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

‘Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.’

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

**People: Thanks be to God.**

Let us pray...

Almighty and everlasting God, may the words of my mouth and meditations of each of our hearts be pleasing, acceptable, even joyful in your sight, for you are our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

For those who know me well, you know that I love the oldies! I used to listen to Elvis and Little Richard and the Motown legends and I knew most of the artists by name and I could sing their songs by heart. Not so much anymore; though I will share with you that our family recently finished in a three-way tie for fifth place at a local restaurant trivia night. As I was preparing this morning's sermon, a classic oldie came to my mind. It was written by Phil Spector and I believe, it was made famous by Lesley Gore. The song is entitled: "To Know Him is to Love Him." And it goes something like this: "To know, know, know him, is to love, love, love him... Just to see him smile, makes my life worthwhile..." That song came to my mind, because it highlights an integral aspect of Psalm 139, which is that, when it comes to those we love...we would actually know them. And I recognize how painfully obvious that sound, that a personal and intimate knowledge of someone would naturally accompany our love for them; nevertheless, it has been my experience, and perhaps yours as well, that seldom, if ever, do we truly know everything there is to know about the people we love.

If you ever watched The Newlywed Game or have seen a rerun, then you will recall that the premise of that game show is to determine how well a newly married couple knows each other. And the way it worked is that a couple would come on the show and one of them would be asked a series of questions, and they would answer those questions based upon how they thought their spouse would answer them. And, if the two of them came up with the same answer, then they were well on their way to winning the game. Now, what is interesting to me is that being on the game show was not a surprise to the contestants. It is not like they were sitting on a park bench outside the studio and someone grabbed them and through them on stage. They knew they were going to be on the show and they had ample time to prepare. Strangely enough, I can't remember a single couple getting all of the questions right! I dare say, whether we call it a "Newlywed" game; call it a "I've been member of this church for 30 years game"; call it a "I have been at Presbyterian or Lutheran or Baptist for my whole life" game. Call it whatever we like. The point is essentially the same: no matter how hard we try, none of us will ever know everything there is to know about the people we love, either individually or corporately. That is certainly not the case with God, however.

Listen again to how David describes God's knowledge. From the outset of Psalm 139, we read: "Oh Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away." As we continue to read the Psalm we come to realize that this knowledge, it comes from having searched out our paths, having been acquainted with all our ways, having known what is on our minds, the words on our tongues. I suppose one could say that, when it comes to truly knowing the people that we love, we know just the tip of the iceberg. So, tell me, if knowing someone is part of what it means to love them, and yet, if such knowledge is so difficult to attain, then what are we supposed to do? Well for starters, maybe we should consider changing the paradigm, and instead of suggesting that to know someone is to love them, maybe we should begin by saying that to love someone, is to know them.

In his book, Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis wrote, "Do not waste your time bothering whether you love your neighbor – act as if you did." Lewis continues, "As soon as we do this, we find one of the great secrets. When [we] are behaving as if [we] love someone, [we] presently come to love [them]." In other words, love begets love -- and in loving, knowing becomes possible! Consider the love a parent has for a child. There's so much to learn about that child, so much to understand,

and I would argue that only when that child is loved will that knowledge be attained. I think about the Kindergarten program here at First (Scots) and how Martha Harken was so faithful and attentive to the needs of its children for over 22 years, and how it was that precisely because she loved them and invested in them and was present in their lives, that she came to know them and they came to know her.

My mother-in-law used to send me articles cut from her local Greenville, SC, newspaper. One of those articles was written by a man named Ed Leap and this is what he said: "One night, as I laid my daughter onto her blanket, the soft fleece one that we put between our bed and the window, so that she could sleep by us and not be afraid, I stretched out next to her and saw something very unique. I saw the world as she saw it." He continued: "The log texture was right before my eyes in the dim light, and the smell of wood was faint. The wind outside the walls blew against the window, which was cold to the touch. In contrast, her bed was a nest of warmth, hemmed in on the other side by the high wall of our mattress, springs and bed frame, all of which, from her viewpoint, seemed to loom 10 feet overhead." Leap closed by saying, "As adults, it's easy to forget what it was like, being a child, being small, independent and vulnerable. It's easy to forget how tired their legs get when they try to keep up with our ostrich legs that leave them running alongside. It's easy to forget how frightening the world looks and sounds. As grownups, we take all the chaos for granted."

I was doing the math, and I can't believe it was something along the lines of 17 years ago, I was taking a group of students to what was, at the time, Dolly Parton's, "Dixie Stampede" located in Myrtle Beach. One of the things I remember about the show is that at random moments throughout, a person named Cletus would come out and provide some comedy relief. On one occasion, Cletus was showing the emcee his socks and written on those socks were the letters "TGIF." "What do those letters stand for?" the emcee asked; and, without a moment's hesitation, Cletus responded: "Why, toes go in first, of course!" And at that, I sort of rolled my eyes, but our son Harrison, who was probably about 4 years old, he laughed out loud! He turned me and said, "Dad that was funny." Looking back on that experience, I realize that while I love our son and our children for that matter, there remains so much more that I need to know about them, and there's still a great deal more that they need to know about me; and the only way that is going to happen, is for our lives to be lived together in love. You see, only by loving someone will we be able to understand, at the deepest levels, how a bright and cheerful a classroom can feel to a kindergartener, or how cavernous a bedroom can feel to a child after dark or how it is that the phrase, "Toes go in first," is really quite hilarious. When we love someone, we are far better equipped to contemplate how frustrating it must be to be stuck in a dead-end job, or to grapple with a floundering relationship, or heaven forbid, to hear that news that no one wants to hear...that nothing can be done.

Oh, have we all but forgotten that those were the words that once echoed in our souls; because friends, we were not just sin-sick, we were not dying to our sins, the Bible tells us that we were dead in our sins. In other words, life had to be given to us because we-didn't-have it. This, the Bible says, is the proof of God's amazing love...that "while we still were sinners Christ died for us" (cf. Romans 5:8). Oh, praise be to God that love and life was revealed to us in the person and work of Jesus Christ. That he dwelled among us full of grace and truth; ah, in this way "we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in

every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin” (cf. Hebrews 4:15). That is how Jesus gives us life, by tasting the entirety of the human experience and reviving our souls which is something that we simply could not do for ourselves and he did it because he loved us! “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, so that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.” At the end of the day, what joy there is in knowing that what God wants is for us to love him; that we would come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing we would have life in his name! We don’t have to know everything there is to know about God in order to love God. All we have to do is love him. Some measure of knowledge will come. It always does but just as God knows us because God first loved us...so too, for us, it must begin with love!

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The following sermon has not been edited by the author; therefore, there may be discrepancies. When in doubt please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website





