

Seventh Sunday of Easter
Wicker Park Lutheran Church
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May 28th, 2017

Language can be confusing, and words are not always clear. A phrase to one person may mean something different to another. For example, the phrase “sanctuary congregation,” can be interpreted by one person as a disregard for the law, while another hears the same phrase as a way to use the laws to promote dignity and justice. So too, in today’s reading from John we come across a phrase that has a multiplicity of interpretations. This phrase is “eternal life.” I wonder, how do *you* define eternal life? As I present that question, I encourage you to get out the half-sheet insert in your bulletin titled “The Seventh Sunday After Easter” and find a pen in the pew. Then, ponder that first question, “how do *you* define ‘eternal life?’”

John’s gospel has its own definition of “eternal life” in verse 3. There we heard, “This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” That’s a unique definition of “eternal life.” It’s not the typical way people often talk about eternal life. It’s not a place with angels, golden streets, and all goodness. Instead, it’s to “know God” and to “know Jesus Christ.”

To “know God” is an important idea in John, so let’s unpack it. In verse 11 we get an idea of what John means when he uses the word “know.” There Jesus said, “so that they may be one, as we are one.” You see, for John, to “know” God is to “be one with God.” To “be one,” is to have a similar approach, be of the same mind, employ a similar attitude, and to reflect the same methodology. Or, using the words we heard during Olive’s baptism, we would say that to “know

God” is to let our light shine so they can see God in our actions. To “be one” means striving to live in a manner similar to Jesus.

Gosh, to “know God” sounds difficult. It seems like a commitment and a lot of work. In today’s reading from Acts, I imagine that the disciples felt that same way when Jesus ascended. They probably stood there staring at the sky thinking, “No way! I cannot be Jesus’ witness.” In that moment, they remembered that Jesus brought life to the broken-hearted. He walked beside those who mourned. He empowered women and other minorities. He responded when the political and religious leaders exploited the vulnerable. He used non-violent resistance to fight terror. You see, Jesus was beyond the ordinary. Understanding and mercy were his superhuman powers. Fear was not his kryptonite. Death was not his game over. In all situations, Jesus achieved superhuman feats as he brought life, meaning, and joy.

Like those disciples, we often stare *at* Jesus. We applaud his actions. We *hear* his words, but we don’t often *listen* to them. Sometimes we label ourselves as “Christians.” However, we often spend more time getting to “know” our favorite idol or news anchor. We often work to emulate those we deem as successful or knowledgeable. Frankly, as people, we don’t care to *know God*. We care more about using our own ideas and feelings to justify a God *we* have created. We are a self-absorbed, even in the spirituality that we pray would widen our understanding. Yet, God has given us an unrestricted gift. Through the ministry of Jesus, we have been given eternal life. It’s for us, freely given to us, and in our baptism it was poured onto us. For in baptism, we, like the disciples, are called to be witnesses of God’s work to the ends of the earth. We are sent to be the hands and feet of God. We are empowered to be “one” with God. For, *that* is eternal life.

Speaking of eternal life, let’s get back to our questions. We learned that, in John, eternal life is to know God. “To know God” means being “one with God,” or, in other words, striving to

mirror the essence of God as communicated in Jesus' ministry. If we hold onto all of that, then what does it look like for our congregation to "know God?" It could be making statements of welcome to communicate that we live out the way that God welcomes all people. It could be supporting those who are unjustly treated, and not how *we* define justice but how *God* defines justice. To "know God" means looking at how we live together. In the church, to "know God" means looking to the scriptures to learn the nature of God. Once we know the nature of God, then we work to discover how we can express God's nature in this time and place.

Let's make this a bit more personal. What does it look like to "know God" in your daily life? It might be caring for the invisible by supporting corporations that respect the environment and all its employees. It could be standing up for minorities who are being harassed, like the two men killed in Portland.

In both our congregation and in our daily lives we must understand God to become one with God. In this work, we come with an open mind not to find support for a God we've created, but rather to recognize God as revealed to us. So, take a moment to think about our work today. In the weeks ahead, how will you prepare yourself to "know God" and, thus, experience eternal life? In other words, how will you deepen your knowledge of God so you can be one with God? Maybe you want to commit to going to church every Sunday for a month, or to reading or listening to the gospel of Mark.

Well, it's that time. Today we're reminded that we have received eternal life. We have a pathway to "know God" and to become one with God. But that's not the end. For, like the disciples, you are sent to reflect God's spirit. Go forth knowing that God goes with you, that God loves you, and that you can reflect God's love. Amen.