

## Lent 4A 2023

Human beings want to know, or perhaps more accurately, we want to *think* that we know.

It makes us feel powerful, secure, yet the reality is that almost everything we think we know is subject to change.

What we really have are theories that help us to predict certain things, but fail to predict others, so we keep building new theories, even about what makes things fall—from Newton's gravity to Einstein's curvature of space to string theory's vibrations.

Science, you see, is about predicting what will happen—what will happen if we take aspirin, too much aspirin, a little aspirin each day, no aspirin?

We run tests, do studies in an attempt to predict more accurately, but we can never know every possible eventuality.

What is true now may not be true tomorrow.

What is true for 99% of the people may not be true for 1%.

Do not touch poison ivy, unless you are in the 1% who do not react, but then you might start reacting at some point.

We dislike *not thinking that we know*.

We complain because coffee or eggs or other foods move from the healthy to the unhealthy column and back again, depending upon new research.

Should I have coffee and eggs for breakfast?

Or will that shave a month off my life?

The same is true with people.

We think we know someone else, or even ourselves, and then we discover something new.

We are not who we thought we were.

We want to think we know, yet it is *not* knowing, living in the mystery, that leads us to a profound relationship with God, though it also makes it difficult to prepare breakfast.

We dwell between thinking we know and realizing that we never quite do, neither totally ignorant nor totally certain.

That seems to be the best we can do in this life.

At some point, when we accept that our knowledge is limited, we not only grow closer to God, but also realize that having a coffee (or a tea, depending on the latest study) with someone is one of the most profound experiences one

can have, much more fulfilling than a \$19 million yacht with a waterfall and available to almost everyone.

As one of my favorite artists, Brian Andreas, says: “There are things you do because they feel right & they make no sense & they make no money & it may be the real reason we are here: to love each other & to eat each other’s cooking & say it was good.”<sup>1</sup>

The more I age, the less I know, and the more I enjoy it.

My knowledge is gradually shrinking down to a narrow certainty that “love your neighbor as yourself” and “love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength” are the best guides to a meaningful life.

Despite this, the desire to know never goes away.

It is deeply embedded in us, as Genesis explains.

We just cannot resist reaching out to the tree of knowledge and eating from it.

Once we try to digest that fruit, we sense our limitations, feel vulnerable, try to hide it, and thereby become distant from God, who nevertheless comes to the garden looking for us.

“Who told you that you were naked?”

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<sup>1</sup> Brian Andreas, real reason, storypeople.

In other words, who told you that you were vastly inferior to me so that you became uncomfortable being my friend?

It is when we humbly acknowledge that we are vulnerable and unknowing, that we really are just making our best guesses to get through the day, that we can embrace the love of God.

The temptation to know is a desire for power, for control, but even God changes God's mind.

God initially anointed Saul to be king, but Saul thought that he knew better than God and refused to follow God's direction.

God then felt remorse and decided to anoint someone else.

The prophet Samuel was somewhere between the humility of God and the arrogance of Saul.

He thought he knew better, but still followed God's orders.

He just did so with attitude.

As directed, Samuel goes to Jesse the Bethlehemite, and thinks he sees the future king in each one of Jesse's son's, but was willing to hear, one by one, that God had rejected all seven of them.

The one God wanted was the eighth, David, who was tending the sheep in the field.

“The LORD does not see as mortals see.”

Woe to us when we imagine ourselves to be certain that we know, that we are always right and everyone better agree with us or we cannot even talk to them, live near them, buy coffee where they buy coffee (or tea).

We make ourselves little gods.

We want the certainty that only God has.

We want control.

As the artist, Andreas, honestly and humbly admits: “I like to think I do things for the right reasons, but mainly I just do things & see how they work out & then I pick a reason afterwards that makes it sound like that was the plan the whole time.”<sup>2</sup>

In the gospel, the Pharisees not only imagine that they know that any healing on the sabbath is evil, but they are determined to make that “truth” a reality by intimidating the blind man who was healed, his family, and everyone around them.

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<sup>2</sup> Brian Andreas, right reason, storypeople.

(Of course, we would not have to work so hard to make a truth true if we really knew it was true.)

So often, “truth” is just what people have agreed to think, and those who tell us what to think, those whom we call influencers, hold the power.

When a man comes along who can heal others, he threatens the Pharisees’ hold on the people.

They might start listening to this healer with his concrete evidence that he is different.

They therefore interrogate the man, his family, the man again, and finally Jesus.

The second time they question the formerly blind man, he replies humbly, “I do not know whether [Jesus] is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”

Unlike the Pharisees, he wants to limit himself to what he truly knows.

As they continue to hound him, however, he rethinks their claims and boldly states, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will.

Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”

The more the man is pushed, the more he asserts the basics.

He points out that they pretend to know what they do not know (that is, they claim that Jesus is a sinner) and pretend not to know what they, as religious leaders, should know (that is, that good comes from God).

Those who claim to *know* God are the farthest from God.

Those with deep spirituality acknowledge that God appears different every day because, at any given time, we can only see aspects of God's infinitude.

The spiritual life requires being comfortable swimming in a sea of unknown.

I sometimes think non-Christians see the followers of the way as people who believe we know much more than we truly know.

In reality, however, our claims are quite modest.

We believe that there is a loving creator who imbues the world with purpose.

Beyond that, we are doing our best day by day to rely on God's love and guidance.

This humility makes us more appreciative of a shared conversation, the ability to listen to a friend in need, a sunset, or for me, the red-bellied snake I found in my yard on Friday afternoon. So cute.

People may hear this and think that I am anti-science.

Those people have not listened.

I am not against making our best guesses, and that is what science does.

I am against pretending that we know when we do not.

Approaching others with the attitude that we are doing our best given the information we have is very different from approaching them with the assumption that we are right and they are stupid or evil.

If *they* pretend to know, on the other hand, then that is on them.

The only way to get close to God is through humility.