

“To Know as We Are Known”

If I say the word (eight/ate) what comes to mind? Is it the number or the action of having consumed food? What if I say the word (jeans/genes)? Do you think of the pants or DNA? Now here is one that really vexes our ears. What if I say the word (there/their/they're)? Do you think of a word for location, possession, or what a group is doing? The English language is rife with homophones; words that sound alike but are spelled differently and have different meanings.¹

Today's scripture readings especially the Gospel, depend on two words which are homophones—know and no. Specifically do we know Jesus or do we say “no” to Jesus.

In the short passage from the First Letter of John we hear him explain that we should know Jesus as God's son through God's own testimony. If we believe God's testimony of Jesus as the only begotten son, we keep that in our hearts. But if we say “no” to that testimony we make God a liar. John makes the choice stark. To accept Jesus as Son of God might be hard for some, but to call the creator, sustainer, and redeemer of the world a liar is to risk more than a charge of blasphemy. It could incur the wrath of God. None of John's Jewish listeners would do that.

Additionally, as John points out “Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.” To know Jesus is the Son of God is to “know that you have eternal life.” To say “no” to Jesus, according to John, distances us hopelessly far from God and from eternal life in God. Our “no” banishes us from all that is just, hopeful, righteous, forgiving, peaceful, and eternal.

The most infamous person to say “no” to Jesus is the disciple Judas. The way Judas is portrayed in the Gospels it is a wonder that Jesus would have selected him to be one of the twelve. What little we know about him is that he was the keeper of the purse for the disciples, and that he stole from the purse for his own desires. He willingly betrays Jesus to the religious authorities and accepts money for doing so. His act of betrayal involves kissing Jesus. A greeting of affection is turned into an act of treachery. He is portrayed as having been so despondent that he commits suicide. The only good thing that comes from his betrayal is that when he returns the thirty pieces of silver the religious authorities use that money to buy a Potter's Field for the burial of the poor, unknown, unclaimed, or indigent. It is called The Field of Blood because it was purchased with blood money.

In the Gospel passage we heard this morning Jesus also speaks about knowing. First, he says that he has made known God's name to the disciples. We would assume that Jews of First Century Palestine would know of God and even know God's name as YHWH, but Jesus makes them know YHWH intimately. Indeed, Jesus goes on to say in this prayer that “Now they know that everything you have given me is from you.” It is not just a matter that they know God more completely through Jesus, but that they know that Jesus' teaching is directly from God the Father. Thus, the disciples still have a close connection with God even after Jesus ascends to heaven. The *Paraclete*, the Holy Spirit, will come to assist them, but their knowledge of God has come from God through Jesus.

There are two additional words in Jesus' prayer that are not homophones but are important because of their repetition—gave/given and belong. Jesus states over

¹ See this website for a list of common English language homophones <https://7esl.com/homophones/>

and over that the disciples were given to him by God. This is compelling in that this varies from the conventional understanding that Jesus called the disciples to be his followers. While one account does not necessarily rule out the other, Jesus is explicit in this passage that these disciples were given to him. He did not choose them, but God chose them for him. What's more, the disciples did not choose to become Jesus followers, but God sent them to him.

This may be why Jesus makes it explicit in the prayer that neither Jesus nor his disciples belong to the world. We know from the first words of John's Gospel that Jesus originated as the Word of the Father in Heaven. This Word was the creating force that brought the world and all that is in it into being.² It is surprising that the twelve disciples, minus Judas, also do not belong to the world. Whether foreordained or through Jesus' calling the disciples are now other. They are not divine sons of God, as Jesus is, but they are changed. Jesus through his prayer reminds us that their otherness gives them a special role. Additionally, he asks that the disciples who have been given to him, taught by him, guarded by him, and taken from worldliness by him, be sanctified in truth. That is the truth of God that they received through him.

Finally, there is a phrase that is neither repeated nor homophonic which gives this passage so much power. It is Jesus' request that the disciples "may have my joy made complete in themselves." All else aside, it is his joy that he wants for his disciples. Belonging is important for they belong to God. Knowing is important because they know of God and are known by God. That they have been given to Jesus and Jesus has given them true knowledge of God. Yet, it the joy of Jesus that will guide them, sustain them, and strengthen them as they go on their individual missions spreading the Good News to a world that is hostile to it.

The world they lived in like the world we live in is consumed by the thirst for money, power, and control. It does not like the gospel of love, peace, compassion, care, and understanding. The world is so hostile to the teaching of Jesus that it infiltrates the institutions of the churches. The so-called "prosperity gospel" with its focus on material goods, big bank accounts, and power is just one example of how Satan has taken possession of parts of the Church just as Satan possessed Judas.

Our struggle is as real as the first disciples', even moreso because we live in the lap of luxury and think it is normal. If we are to know and be known, our prayer needs to mimic Jesus' prayer to know his joy. The joy that no matter our circumstances makes our life complete, rich, and full. The joy that cannot be taken away regardless of the condition of our life. The joy of Jesus in the Father and the Father in him. Cherish the joy that was planted deep within you at birth. See how it changes your life as you are drawn closer to being the one you were created to be. The one that this struggling world needs more than it knows.

² John 1:1-18