

Sermon
The First Sunday in Lent
The Church of the Ascension, Ottawa
The Rev. Victoria Scott

Readings: Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7; Psalm 32; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew
4:1-11

“To know, know, know you, is to love, love, love you, and I do...”

These are song lyrics – maybe you know the song? It has been recorded by various artists over the years. These are also the lyrics of God’s song to us. God sings to us in creation, in scripture, in Jesus, and in the gift of the Holy Spirit: “To know, know, know you is to love, love, love you, and I do”.

What does this have to do with Adam and Eve? With Jesus’s Temptation in the desert? What does this have to do with the Lenten journey of fasting and almsgiving and penitence and repentance that we embark on every year at this time? What does it have to do with our Annual Vestry Meeting after the service today? Being known and loved has everything to do with it...being known and loved is the *why* of Lent, and it’s the *why* of being in community.

A song of knowing and loving was the background music in the Garden of Eden. God said to Adam and Eve “I know you, and I love you”, and God asked them to trust in this love. Trusting in that love means that God and Adam and Eve are connected, “in step” with each other. God doesn’t say to them “Prove to me that you are worthy, and then I’ll love and care for you”. God doesn’t ask Adam and Eve to take care of themselves. God asks them to trust in the “bigger picture” of creation, to be part of – partners in – that bigger picture of creation. God says to Adam and Eve, I know you, and I love you, and God invites that same knowing and loving from them.

Knowing and loving is about trust. Trust is a hard thing, though. Fear and doubt get in the way of trust all the time, and this is what happens with Adam and Eve – not just with Eve, but with Adam too –

fear and doubt that God might not be faithful, that God might not unconditionally know and love them so they'd better have a contingency plan to "make it on their own". In doubting God's knowing and loving they fall out of step. This is, of course, not about a literal Adam and Eve. This is us. This is all of us, being human. This is our human condition...to fall out of step with God... to struggle in the grey area between love and fear, between believing and doubting...between power and powerlessness...

In our humanity, the words "to know you is to love you and I do" come with an echo, a shadow of shame and fear and doubt. That message of shame and fear sounds something like this:

"If people knew the things I think, the things I've said, the things I want to do, who would love me?"

It's this echo of shame that makes us feel that we have to "go it alone", to do better so that we are worthy of love. It's this echo of shame that makes us afraid to be vulnerable. It's the whisper of fear that makes us cling to power and control.

The story of Adam and Eve comes to us as an example of what happens when we let doubt and fear – and shame and blame and a longing for power and control – separate us from God. It's an example of what happens when we let those things separate us from one another.

The story Matthew's Gospel brings us the opposite. This story of Jesus's temptation or testing in wilderness is often read as being about his amazing capacity to "resist" the devil, but look closely at his responses, and you'll see that it illustrates a symbiotic reliance on God. It's about trust.

God sings "to know you is to love you" to Jesus at his baptism, and Jesus does trust in God. And Jesus lives out of that trusting...even when that trusting takes him into the wilderness. Even when that trusting takes him to Jerusalem, and the cross. That trusting holds him, and carries him through the wilderness, through suffering and death, and into resurrection. Jesus is God showing us what it looks like

to love and trust: it looks like resurrection. It looks like a love that never ends...

Maya Angelou once said in an interview:

“I’m always amazed when people walk up to me and say, ‘I’m a Christian.’ I think, ‘Already? You already got it?’ I’m working at it...”

We do have to work at it. The trusting that I’ve been talking about takes work. There are lots of things in us and in our world that push us toward fear and doubt. We see, and hear and do things that make us doubt God’s song: to know you is to love you and I do. Things happen that make it difficult to trust others.

We are approaching three years of responding to the pandemic. I know that Ascension worked hard – and did very well – at remaining connected throughout the pandemic – using Zoom, gathering outdoors, and many other things – but we have all experienced some disconnection in this time. Fear and doubt have been a big part of these years: what is safe, what isn’t? Power and powerlessness have also wound their way through these years. We have felt powerless, and we longed for the power to control what was happening around us. Fear and doubt, and the struggle for power all create disconnection.

As we continue to emerge and reconnect with each other after three years of pandemic, there are fears, and doubts that we still need to attend to. There are power struggles in us and in our world that we need to name and work through. After the service today we’ll gather for our Annual Vestry Meeting. We have to do this to attend to the business of being in community here on Echo Drive, and as a Diocesan church. We’ll make decisions about finances, and about governance. Part of why we meet every year is that it’s actually a legal requirement, but the other reason we do it is so that we have an opportunity to communicate and make decisions together. Communication in community and consensus decision making are about being attentive to fears and doubts. It’s about paying attention to power, and to how we inhabit the particular structure and framework that holds us in community here on Echo Drive. This is part of knowing and loving one another as God

knows and loves us.

I said at the beginning that “to know you is to love you and I do” is the *why* of these Lenten days. Fasting and almsgiving and penitence and repentance aren’t empty actions. These actions are not about proving ourselves to God, or to others. The *why* in doing these things is to strip away the things that get in the way of accepting and flourishing in that relationship of being known and loved by God. The *why* in doing these things is to make space for our hearts and minds and souls to let go of fear and doubt, and to ground ourselves in trusting God.

Last week we buried our Alleluias so that we can appreciate this expression of joy and praise all the more at Easter. We buried them in this earth here at the front thinking about the transformation that is possible in the earth, and in the tomb. You were given a little piece of paper when you came in today, and an invitation to think about the things that you might strip away in your hearts and minds this Lenten season. Things that weigh on you. Things that are getting in the way of trust and connection with God and with others and with our world. I invite you to write those things on your strip of paper, and after the hymn that follows the sermon, you’ll be invited to come and bury that paper in this earth, offering those things to God for healing and transformation.

To know, know, know you, is to love, love, love you, and I do...I pray that we will all hear God’s song of knowing and loving whispering to you and throughout all of creation this Lenten season. In Jesus name. Amen.