Easter 4

John 10:11-18

April 25, 2021

One day, when I was in college, I went to a thing my department was doing. I’d been told I needed to introduce myself to the professor who was in charge of a project I wanted to be part of.

I knew who he was, of course, because it was a small department and there were pictures of the professors on a bulletin board in the hallway. And I knew him by reputation, from friends and classmates.

I looked around the room and finally spotted him. So I walked over and introduced myself. Halfway through my introduction, he smiled and said, “I know who you are. I was hoping to talk to you.”

I was startled. I didn’t realize he knew who I was. I hadn’t take a class from him. We’d never been in the same room, as far as I knew. I wouldn’t have been surprised if he thought I looked familiar, but he knew stuff about me, about the things I’d done.

It was unsettling. I didn’t quite know what to think.

Later, a friend told me, “Well, of course he knew who you are. You were recommended to him by the same people who talked about the project to you and encouraged you to do it. And, besides, the professors talk about us students, you know.”

Well, *that* was just great. People were talking about me and thought I had been doing good work. So now I wasn’t just unsettled, I was intimidated, because that meant people had expectations of me that I needed to meet.

I was fortunate that my friend knew me well enough to know what I was thinking at that point. She began to encourage me, telling me that this was a great opportunity and she were sure I would be good at it, and so were the people who recommended me. “I know you,” she said. “You’ll be fine.”

Being known by people like this can be both comforting and scary. But even the people who know us best don’t know us as well as God knows us.

In Psalm 139, the psalmist tells us just how well God knows us: For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. …My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed.[[1]](#footnote-1)

*That* is how well God knows us.

In our Gospel text for today, Jesus tells us “I know my sheep and my sheep know me; *in the same way*, the Father knows me and I know the Father.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

Knowing, in John’s Gospel, isn’t about facts. It’s about being familiar with a person, having an understanding of what a person is like. This kind of relationship binds us together. It goes beyond knowing a person’s name to knowing things about them, caring about them, being invested in their well-being. The more you know about them, the deeper the relationship.

And God, as the Psalmist reminds us, knows *a lot* about us.

When that professor said he knew me, what made it scary was that it meant people were talking about me. Professors I had taken classes from had mentioned me as a candidate for this project. And that meant I had to trust that they weren’t picking me because, well…they had to pick someone, and they figured I wouldn’t say no. There were other students who were just as qualified. But they chose *me* for a reason. They *knew* something about me that made them think I was the right choice.

What made it intimidating was that now I had to live up to what they thought they knew about me. Because my professors were going to expect me to do well, and I didn’t want to disappoint them. Or have them think less of me. Decide they were wrong about me. Give up on me.

What a blessing it is for us that God does not work that way.

I was sent a video earlier this week that showed a sheep stuck in a hole. The video begins with the sheep being carefully pulled out of the hole. Once freed, the sheep bounces off and runs down the field. Upon seeing another hole, the sheep jumps, trying to clear it….and falls into the hole.

I showed it to some friends and all of us agreed that it felt like an apt metaphor for our lives.

No matter how many times that sheep jumps into a hole, the shepherd is going to pull it out. But the shepherd is also going to put up a fence to try to keep the sheep away from the hole. And the shepherd is going to make sure the sheep has enough food and hay and shelter.

It’s easy for us to wonder if God will get tired of pulling us out of the holes we jump into just as soon as we’re pulled out of the last one. To wonder just how much it’s true that God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.[[3]](#footnote-3)

For good and bad reasons, we give up on each other. But God doesn’t give up on us. No matter how many times we jump into that hole, God’s still going to be there to pull us out. God’s still going to provide for us the way that we hear about in our Psalm for today.

Because God’s love knows no ends. And God will stop at nothing to to bring each of us into the kind of relationship that God the Father and God the Son share. It’s a relationship where we are fully known and invited to better know the God who created us and all that has ever or will ever exist.

You don’t bother to know the sorts of things God knows about us if you don’t care about that person, if you don’t love that person. And you certainly don’t go about laying down your life for the benefit of people you don’t care about, people you don’t love, people you don’t want to see thrive and flourish, the way Jesus did.

As the sheep in this metaphor, there’s not a whole lot asked of us but to trust in the Good Shepherd. To listen for the voice of the Shepherd speaking to us. To trust that the Shepherd knows what is beneficial for us. And to follow the Shepherd, not the hired hands of the world who seek their own glory.

We are known by God more deeply and intimately than we can possibly imagine. We are loved more fully than we can possibly imagine. And God will never tire of loving us and forgiving us, never stop trying to draw us deeper into the divine relationship.

Thanks be to God for such a gift.

1. Psalm 139:13-16 New Revised Standard Version [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. John 10:14 *The Message* (italics mine) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Exodus 34:6; Numbers 14:18; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Nahum 1:3; Nehemiah 9:17 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)