

Learn

[John 10:22-30](#)

I'd like you to take a moment to identify someone in the church that you don't know very well. It may be that you know their name but not much else, or perhaps you don't even know their name yet. And I'd like you to take just a moment to imagine a conversation with them. You would probably ask them a few questions about themselves – what might you ask?

... so just shout it out – what questions might you ask someone you were just meeting?

Now these are all questions about the person – where they live, how they came to St Benedict's and so on. In order to get to know someone you start by asking questions about them. In order to know them you need to know *about* them, but just knowing *about* them wouldn't be the same as getting to know them because you could read a book about them but not actually know them.

It's like that with God too. Knowing about God is not the same as knowing God but one of the ways of getting to know God is to find out more about her.

Today I am continuing our miniseries on the Way of Love, Practices for the Spiritual Path and today's word is learn. In the gospel reading we heard Jesus say that his sheep know his voice. But I wonder how they learn to know it?

In my experience, it takes a while before we learn to recognize a friend's voice. I have to know someone for a while before I know its them calling me before I turn around.

Several years ago, Barbara Hirahara was seriously ill. Her body had gone into a toxic state as the result of taking some medication for too long and her kidneys were severely compromised. I visited her in the hospital and her daughters told me that she delirious and wasn't making much sense. Barbara was lying on her side with her back to me. I put my hand lightly on her shoulder and said, "Hallo Barbara." To everyone's surprise she lucidly replied, "Hallo Caro". Clearly she had listened to me preaching for long enough to know without a doubt who it was. Later she told me that in that moment she knew she was going to pull through.

Barbara had learned to recognize my voice just as we can learn to recognize Jesus' voice.

But Jesus' voice, as we discussed last week, comes to us in many different ways. Sometimes it is loud and clear as Paul experienced when he was blinded by the light on the road to Damascus, but often it is quiet and subtle. The more we can follow the inkling that maybe this is God and see where it leads us, the more we will hear that gentle voice.

When we want to know someone we need to spend time with them which means showing up in places where they are likely to be or making plans to meet them. Christ plays in ten thousand places¹, but especially in the worship of his people gathered, and in the Word written.

We learn to know God when we meet her in the sacrament of the Eucharist and in the midst of his people. Which is why our first baptismal vow is to “continue in the apostles teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers.” It is here that we meet God – where our intention and attention is centered on the living God and where God meets with us in the Eucharistic feast. It is here that God is manifest in the Body of Christ and then taken out into the world by each one of us. Just as the bread is broken and distributed, the presence of God is a gift for the entirety of Creation and as we leave we each take our piece out as a blessing to the wider world of God’s people.

Yet there is a reason that we don’t move directly to the table when we get here. We spend time praising God and listening to the Word, for God also meets with us through prayer and through the Scriptures. As we listen to the ancient stories, the narrative of God’s love among God’s people, the Holy Spirit moves to make the words come alive so that it is a living book, a powerful word to our hearts. As we learn about God we get to know God and become more finely attuned to her presence.

We read the Scriptures together as part of every service. It is a foundational practice of our communal life, and for many of us it is also a foundational practice of our individual lives. If you are serious about learning to know God in a deeper way in your life then time spent connecting with her through the Scriptures is time well spent. And time spent studying with others, teasing out the meaning of the Word, is not only helpful but can be delightful as together we discover new ways of understanding God’s way of healing and salvation. I encourage you to consider joining the Sunday morning Bible Study as a way to open up to new levels of spiritual depth.

Whether you encounter God in the scriptures and whether you encounter God in the Eucharist is largely up to you. God does not force himself on us. We get to open our hearts and minds up to the Spirit. And we have God’s promise that when we turn toward God, God will turn toward us for God loves us fiercely and longs for nothing more than our loving attention and faithful service.

Scholarship has always been a high value in the Benedictine tradition and also in the Anglican church. We are a people who love to learn and to think – we believe that we were given intellects to use them in understanding the ways of God and of Creation. And so learning of all kinds is important to us, but especially learning that helps us to reach new insights about Godself. This step on the Way of Love is familiar to us here at St. Ben’s.

Several of us met earlier this week and agreed that we want to continue the Hollister Institute as an outreach ministry which seeks to engage those who are religious but not spiritual, and those who are searching for God, in conversation about philosophy, religion and spirituality. We also noted that for many of us intellectual stimulation is an important part of what makes these conversations so

¹ [As Kingfishers Catch Fire](#) – Gerard Manley Hopkins

interesting and fruitful. I know that, for myself, I often meet God most profoundly through intellectual insight.

Just as part of getting to know someone new is learning about them, so learning about God and God's ways helps us to know her more deeply.

In our gospel reading this morning, for some reason the leaders of the Jewish people, did not use their learning to discern that Jesus was the Messiah. They wanted more signs, more proof. Many people continue to want more proof – they want God to answer their prayers before they believe there is a God. But we have learned that God is always available, always calling to us, always challenging us, always loving us.

We who are enrolled in the reign of God, are always learning to follow the voice of our God more clearly and to follow the path of Jesus as we minister God's love to one another and to the world around us, bringing healing to the whole of Creation.