

KNOWING WHAT BUILDS UP
FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

1 COR 8:1-13
FEB 1, 2015

¹ Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” This “knowledge” puffs up, but love builds up. ² If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. ³ But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.

⁴ Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “an idol has no real existence,” and that “there is no God but one.” ⁵ For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”—⁶ yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

⁷ However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. ⁸ Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. ⁹ But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰ For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? ¹¹ And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. ¹² Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. ¹³ Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

We live in an information age.

Partly because of media technology, our lives are flooded
with more blaring, glaring information
than we know what to do with.

You can get information on what your friends
or favorite famous person is up to almost every minute.

Almost any question you have, you can find an answer to
almost instantly.

Some say, since you can learn anything you need to know
on line, why do we need schools or teachers any more?

There are plenty of reasons.

One is that not everything you can learn is actually true.

We have even more need for trusted guides to truth.

Another reason is that we need to learn not just information
but what to do with information.

More information has not made us better people.

Studies have show that being successful in life comes from
not just having intellectual intelligence but
what is now called emotional Intelligence

which comes from not just reading books
but knowing how to read other people
and most especially knowing ourselves
and why we do the things we do.

This is why we have Lutheran schools and why today
we are celebrating Lutheran schools with the theme
“Standing in Christ, Serving Others”
As Christians, our reason for what we do
is not just knowledge but love,
so our goal in Lutheran Schools is not just to teach
knowledge but love.

WE do NEED MORE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD’S TRUTH
but WE NEED MORE: SERVING OTHERS IN LOVE
and so WE NEED MORE: GOD KNOWING AND LOVING US

WE NEED MORE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD’S TRUTH

² If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as
he ought to know.

⁷ However, not all possess this knowledge.

You may know story of Albert Einstein attending college event
where he met student who didn’t know who he was
and asked what he did.

He replied, “I think of myself self as a student of physics”
Student replied, “Oh, I finished that last semester.”

The more you know, the more you know you don’t know.
This doesn’t mean we can never be sure of anything.

Paul goes on to say, We know there is no God but one.
We know everything exists comes from him
and that all of us exist for him.

We know that Jesus Christ is this true God.

One reason we invest a lot in teaching what we do is because,
as Paul says, “not all possess this knowledge.”

What you need to know about God is very simple.

This Jesus lived & died for you so you can be forgiven.
but there is always more for us to learn about this.

We want to know - and teach our children - more and more
about this true God and his creation and why we exist,
and more about Jesus and what he has done for us.
an never foolishly imagine we know all we need to know,
which, Paul says, just shows that we don’t.

Paul is writing here to the Corinthians, whom he says
are very gifted with knowledge, but still have problems.
One problem is fact that many used to worship idols.
Idols were worshiped by offering sacrifices of animals.
The meat was then eaten in feasts at temple with idea
that those eating it were joining in sacrifice.
This same thing was true in Jewish temple worship.
This is something like the unity in faith we express
when we eat Holy Communion together
and so join in receiving benefit of Jesus' sacrifice.
Meat left over from these feasts was sold in market
with proceeds going to support the idol temple.
So, Christians might buy this meat, which may not
be labeled as coming from an idol sacrifice.
Was this supporting idol worship? If they ate it,
were they also participating in the sacrifice to an idol?
Paul says, those gods being worshiped don't really exist
so we know they haven't done anything to the meat,
it is same as any other meat, but there is more to know.
If Christians eat meat known to be from an idol sacrifice,
new believers may follow their example and think
it must be fine to still participate in idol sacrifices.
So, Paul says, our knowledge could end up destroying
the faith of a weaker believer.
I don't know of an exact parallel for us today, but it could be like
our singing a song in worship that praises God
in such general terms that a Jew or Muslim or Hindu
could theoretically say the same thing.
We may know that the God we mean is the triune God
but worship guest or new believer might get impression
it doesn't matter what your personal idea of God is,
So, instead of singing songs like that, we will sing songs
that are specific about God and what Jesus does for us.
When we worship, we know we can always dare to come
into God's presence because of Jesus' forgiveness.
but we regularly begin worship with confession & absolution
not because of a rule that says we have to
but so we don't leave impression we can worship God
and be accepted by him without repenting of our sin.
It helps us and others to understand why we worship as we do
because of the true God we worship, but

WE NEED MORE: SERVING OTHERS IN LOVE

we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” This “knowledge” puffs up, but love builds up.

Paul’s point to the Corinthians is that the Christian knows the right thing to do not just by knowing what they have a right to do or what they are free to do but by what is loving and helpful for others.

In the way of the world, the weak serve the strong because they have to, which includes the those who are smart & know a lot telling those who don’t know as much what to do.

But Paul says in the church it is like being in a family where the big and strong take care of those more helpless and we are expected to put up with a stupid little brother because we know better.

We may know childish fears are silly, feelings of depression or despair may be irrational, anxiety about the future is useless and foolish, grief over lost loved ones is short sighted, belief in false gods is stupid, but to be insensitive to those who feel this way is not helpful. It doesn’t build them up.

We want to teach our children to be intelligent but if they get proud or arrogant, they have wrong idea. Just as important or even more so, we want to teach them to be loving.

How do we teach this? Not just from a book. Our body language often speaks louder than our words. It is taught by how we ourselves are, the compassion and care we show not just to children but also to everyone who makes foolish mistakes and how we relate to all whose faith may be weak, Because we know our own tendency to be weak & foolish.

This is why we do things we shouldn’t have to do. Anyone who goes to church should know God is our creator who has made us male & female and gives us truth about how to live in commandments. even if this is not what is taught in school books.

One can know better and still get good education there.

But why give the impression we accept these things
when we can carefully teach the truth
and teach Christ's love in our own school.

This is not easy to do, just as it is not always easy for us
to know how to live in a way that builds others up
But as we teach our children to love by loving others,
we ourselves learn it from God's love for us.

WE NEED MORE: GOD KNOWING AND LOVING US

³ But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.

It is often true in the business world and it is true also in church:

It is not what you know but who you know,
and even more important is who knows you.
In a business gathering, it is valuable if you can
walk up to an important person and know them by name.
It would be worth even more if they walk up to you
and call you by name.

This is what the Lord of the universe does for us.

This is what makes us valuable and important,
not how much we know about God,
although we need to know who the true God is
or even how loving we are, as important as that is,
but how much God loves us

God knows everything, including all of our faults & foolishness,
and yet he loves us anyway.

God, in his wisdom, knows how to help the ignorant.
He has come in person to reveal himself as Jesus Christ,
who clearly taught God's truth
and powerfully demonstrated his great love.

He who was strong bent to help the weak
when he who created life died in our place on the cross.

It is because of this that he who knows all our sins -
even better than we do - gives us forgiveness.

The one thing we need to know most
is that we are known by God and loved by him.

This is why we do what we do

Unlike idol worshipers, we know better than to think
we are saved by things we do in rituals.

Our rituals are instead ways God gives and strengthens faith
in what Jesus has done for us.

We know food is not what commends us to God
but he knows how to use it to offer himself to us.
When we eat Holy Communion together,
we are not participating in offering the sacrifice
but in receiving the benefit of Jesus' sacrifice for us.
God gives us his gifts in both word and deed.
This is why we teach our children in both word and deed
to both stand firm in Christ by knowing he knows us
and serve others by sharing the love he gives us.

WE NEED MORE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S TRUTH
so everyone does indeed know there is no God but one
who is our creator and redeemer, Jesus
but **WE NEED MORE: SERVING OTHERS IN LOVE**
not just proudly knowing what is right
but humbly using what we know to build others up
and so **WE NEED MORE: GOD KNOWING AND LOVING US**
which is why we are what we are and do what we do
and why we are saved, not by any sacrifice
or anything else we do but through faith
in what he has done for us.