

**“Know Your God”**

John 14:15-21, Acts 17: 22-25

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How well do you know your God? This simple question led me to study theology and guided me to become an ordained minister. When I was a high school student, I asked myself. “Do I really know my God? If God really exists as my Creator, I must start to know Him first.” But I humbly confess to you that I haven’t mastered my faith and my knowledge yet. I am still learning, questioning and humbly seeking the presence of God in my life. Faith seeking life is like a journey to know, to love God and to practice it not only in our hearts and minds but also through hands and feet. This year is my 10<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary with Youngjae. Friends, I finally made it ten years! When I was newly married, I had no idea why people celebrated their 25<sup>th</sup> or 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Now I admire their perseverance, tenacity and persistence! After 10 years’ of married life, I learned a simple lesson. “*Happy wife, Happy life*”. It is never easy to love your wife with all your hearts, and all your soul and all your might. I read a joke that made me laugh;

“And God promised men that good and obedient wives would be found in all corners of the world. Then He made the earth round---and laughed and laughed and laughed.”

Simply speaking, “Obedience to my wife is never easy”. This morning, I want to re-affirm our faith, knowledge and love in God.

There is an important prayer that every Jewish family cherishes and recites every day. It is in Deuteronomy 6: 4-9, “*Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.* Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise.” (NRSV) It is called *Shema* (It means “Hear O Israel”). Jewish people recite this prayer every morning and evening in their prayer services. They believe that their God is the only God. And their duty is to love God.

After Jesus came and proclaimed the good news to us, he taught his disciples and us about a new image of God through the Great Commandment in Matthew 22:36-40. The disciples asked Jesus, “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” He said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all

your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: *‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’*” (NRSV)

Christianity believes in the community of the Triune God in relationships, particularly in love. We are only able to grasp God only in our human experiences. All God’s creations were created out of God’s love. Truly, our spiritual identity is love in God’s image!

Jesus didn’t mean to abolish the traditional Jewish faith in God, but he extended the love of God by fulfilling the law. His understanding and range of God went beyond biological family relationships and reached out to other human connections such as females, gentiles, Samaritans, and the poor and socially isolated. He proclaimed the love of God for all human kind. Christian faith affirms that every person is a child of God. Every person is of sacred worth and we are connected one another as “Being-in-relationships.” Simply saying, as God loves us, we love and serve others in the name of Christ.

In our second Scripture reading, the book of Acts, Apostle Paul made a missionary trip to Greece and preached the Good news to people in Athens. The city of Athens was well known for great philosophers, thinkers as an economically affluent city. But they had never heard about Jesus and the love of God in our relationships. In ancient Greek society, there was no concept of God as Creator and giver of life or the loving God. They understood Creator as a designer of the Universe as the ultimate form or ideal. The word, “Logos” in academia came out of the ancient Greek term. Paul observed that they worshiped God even though they didn’t know Jesus Christ. He named it “An unknown God” and it helped them to make connection through Jesus Christ, the incarnated God of love. The great contribution that Paul made in our Christianity is that he expanded the love of God from Jewish culture to other gentile cultures and countries. He was firmly convinced that God loves all people. And he wanted to be a vessel to spread God’s love and holiness to all people through his passionate mission trips.

Speaking love, Human sexuality in our days became a huge and controversial matter that has divided the church. And the body of Christ experiences schism and struggles in pain. It happens not only in our denomination, but also in our brother and sister denominations. Presbyterian Church in U.S.A has been losing 5 % out of their memberships every year due to homosexuality issue. The Episcopal Church in the United States of America ordained a gay bishop in 2003 and their body has already been divided over the issues of homosexuality. Their mother church, the Church of England still

maintains that same-sex partnership are acceptable for lay persons, and gay clergy may enter in a civil partnership as long as they are expected to give assurances of celibacy.<sup>1</sup>

Our denomination has been battling this issue over decades since 1972. Last April, our denomination's top court, the Judicial Council ruled over the issue. Our Western Jurisdiction elected our denomination's first openly gay bishop Karen Oliveto last year July. But this election was illegal in terms of consecration because her legal marriage publically assumed "self-avowed practicing homosexuality". This is a clear violation of the Book of Discipline, our rule book. But the Judicial Council also affirmed that she is still a bishop in good standing unless there is a complaint or trial within our Western Jurisdiction. It may sound strange to you, but to my knowledge, the Judicial Council can merely have power to rule over the issues based on the Book of the Discipline but each Jurisdiction has constitutional protection and right to process trials and actions. Our denomination has not reached consensus over this Human sexuality matter yet. The Council of Bishops commissioned a special task force team, "A Way Forward" to make a proposal to the special General Conference in February 2019. As you know, the General Conference is the highest governing body presiding overall all United Methodist Churches. This General Conference will be critical examining the Human sexuality matter in our denomination if we will still remain as one body or not.

What does Jesus say about this issue of Human sexuality? Jesus tells us in the first Scripture reading, in the Gospel of John 14: 21, "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them loves me. Whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, I will love them and reveal myself to them." Jesus didn't tell us the right answer to all challenging cases. Rather he emphasizes and reminds us of the basic spiritual principle of Love. Love is his answer to our challenges. Jesus was not a politician, or a lawyer but he was a prophet, teacher and the Son of God who proclaimed God's love for all. He challenges us not to be stuck in legalism but to love people in the law.

One of our parishioners sent me an article by Pastor Olsen, Lutheran ministry. He wrote a meaningful article about our Christian attitudes, "At the last judgment, Jesus doesn't ask anyone about who they voted for, how many times they have been divorced, what their sexual history or orientation is or from whom they [have not received wedding services] did or did not bake

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Christian\\_denominational\\_positions\\_on\\_homosexuality](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Christian_denominational_positions_on_homosexuality)  
Accessed May 19 2017

wedding cakes. [Did you hear about a gay couple who were denied service to bake their wedding cakes?] Jesus' sole concern is for how we treated the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the imprisoned, those deemed "least" among us. No, I didn't get that from any private chat with God. We small church pastors have to rely on the Bible for our intel. I got this stuff from the Gospel of Matthew, 25<sup>th</sup> Chapter to be precise. As I said, that too, is in the Bible."

As church, we are not called to be social and political activists, but we are followers and disciples of Jesus Christ who commit ourselves to him and follow his Great Commandments and pursue the spiritual principle of love. We take these approaches to see the issue of homosexuality with compassion and love that Jesus taught us on this matter. God is love and love ultimately wins.

Our Church is an inclusive, reconciling congregation "We believe that each individual is of sacred worth. Therefore, we pledge ourselves to engage in the sacred hospitality and responsibility Christ taught, regardless of race, culture, age, sexual orientation, family structure, economic situation, and mental or physical condition." This is what we believe in God and find our spiritual identity in Jesus Christ. I want to conclude my message sharing a reference list that I found meaningful. It is about 'Christian Response' to social issues.

What is your response to these social issues?

**Male-love them.**

**Female-love them.**

**Unsure-love them.**

**Gay-love them.**

**Straight-love them.**

**Unsure-love them.**

**Addict-love them.**

**Sober-love them.**

**Believer- love them.**

**Unbeliever-love them**

**Unsure-love them<sup>2</sup>**

Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> An excerpt from the imperfectpastor.com Accessed May 19, 2017