

## I Know You

Many people view baptism as not only a rite of the Church, a tradition we celebrate where a baby, child or adult is named before the congregation and is introduced to God. Today's first reading from the prophet Isaiah tells us differently.

We are told that not only did God name us in the womb, God also set us apart for a life of service in some way. That even before we draw our first breath God knows us. As we grow inside our mothers and hear the voices of our parents, God is with us. God formed us. God knows us.

Baptism is a remarkable rite of the Church involving water, fire and air. We baptise with water; whether sprinkled, splashed or immersed. We receive a candle (fire) to set us on the path towards the light (of Christ). And air. Well, we all need to breathe to stay alive. Baptism is not about introducing someone to God. It is not about introductions to faith.

Baptism is about bringing together the faithful to welcome another into their midst and hopefully help that new member of the family grow into the family as they grow in their relationship with God.

There are promises made at the baptism which includes asking the community of faith to support the candidate in their life in Christ. And the answer is, "I will with God's help". Because you see, we cannot do it alone. We cannot grow into the fullest person we are called to be without God and without each other.

Paul's letter to the Church in Corinth is a snippet of a much larger message. Paul is grateful for the early church and the people who are in it and are willing to live in a new way. The Corinthian church in Paul's time was a party place, where hedonism and excess was key. Paul stepped in and tried to show another way to be in communion with each other...while learning to be in communion and community with God.

I've been known to give Paul a hard time yet the early Corinthians Church had women just as involved in leadership as men. Paul sent out female deacons to do God's work on Paul's behalf. He contacted the local folks who were known for their leadership and he showed them a new and deeper way to be with each other. He showed them how to be closer together in God.

Have you ever had someone approach you and say "I know you! You're Eric's daughter" or something along those lines? I'm always a bit disoriented when someone says "I know you!" to me because there is a great chance they know me yet I have no idea who they are. I must admit I often spend the first few minutes trying to figure out their name and whether or not I should know it.

These days, more and more often I'll ask them to refresh my memory of their name. More than fifty percent of the time, the reply is their name followed by "you won't know my name, I met you at so and so's funeral."

The next several seconds are absolute panic, which I pray is not projected on my face as I pray they don't then say "That thing you said was so profound" and in fact, I have no recollection of exactly what I said, and I hope they won't ask me to repeat it.

Have you ever formed an opinion of someone, whether you had actually met them or not, then found yourself changing your mind? I have. I've worked with people I didn't particularly like, yet not for any specific reason. And once I've had the opportunity to get to know them, it turns out we have a lot in common and they are, in fact, quite lovely.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is spoken of, to a crowd, by his cousin John, who says:  
'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, "After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me."

I myself did not know him; but I came baptising with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.'

The community has been living in constant fear, under Roman occupation. They knew that God would send a messenger, and they knew that the Messiah would be accompanied by one who would make introductions; and here they are!

In fact, John takes the step of referring to Jesus, publicly, twice as The Lamb of God. John's writings and those of Paul are the only ones who refer to Jesus as the lamb of God. The reason is twofold. It's telling the crowd gathered around that John is NOT the Messiah, the lamb of God is. AND it is so people will stop misunderstanding John's message, and will instead, realise that Jesus is the Messiah, the Lamb of God.

Its latin translation "Agnus Dei" is used in Coptic and orthodox churches when the host is broken during Communion. It is also said prior to the distribution of Eucharist, "O Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world, have mercy on us."

Have you ever tried to remember the name of someone who is well known yet at the moment you try to recall their name you find yourself unable? A typical discourse is like this...I watched the most amazing movie last night. It starred, oh dear...what is her name...the one who was in that movie with the other woman, who's very well known. She's been knighted or is a dame or something, she's from Britain, oh dear, her name is on the tip of my tongue. She's been in all those movies, dear God, you know who I mean?

And it is at this point in the conversation that the person I'm speaking to blinks twice and walks away, or has joined in the "guess the actor" game or, rarely says the actor's name while grasping at straws and eventually guesses it.

Rest assured, this NEVER happens with God. Or at least, I hope it never happens with God.

Could you imagine. Peter says to God, "what's the name of that female priest, you know the one, she was ordained at the same cathedral where she was baptised, pastored in Dorchester, then decided to move across the country AT THE END OF JANUARY to start a new post in Fernie, British Columbia.

She shaves her head, wears hearing aids and is inquiring about getting her eyes lasered. You know the one...?

God says "Andrea?" Peter says, "That's her!"

God says, "And what of her, Peter?"

And Peter says, "I was just curious if you knew her."

God says "I know her. Just like I know you."

And God does know me, just as God knows you, and you, and you.

We know each other. Perhaps we knew each other through Church or the community; she Senior's or the post office? Over the past four and a half years, we have learned much more about each other and about the Church.

I'm hoping you have taken time to read the report I sent you yesterday "A Path Forward". There is some language that will startle and perhaps upset you. Yet the reality is the Church that we knew fifty years ago is gone and it's not coming back. The Church that we knew ten years ago is gone and it's not coming back. I would venture far enough to say that the Church we knew pre-COVID is gone and it's not coming back.

We can treat this as a long lament and plan our death, as Church.

We can ignore the report and continue what we have been doing, which would be akin to rearranging the deckchairs on the Titanic.

OR we can take a look at who we are, what we stand for, and who we see ourselves as a Parish in the Elk Valley.

We are fortunate in many ways in joining together as Christ Church Anglican and as Fernie Knox United Church. We now share space full-time. We now share an Incumbent, priest, minister, pastor. We continue to share a Bookkeeper and we have several joint committees.

So we now stand at a threshold of opportunity. What this looks like is up to us. We have done a lot of work and done it well. And our work is not yet over.

This afternoon we are sitting down and talking about money.

A subject that nobody really wants to talk about, and yet, it's essential in moving forward as The Church.

We are no longer solely the United Church of Canada.

We are no longer solely the Anglican Church of Canada.

Separately we are Fernie Knox United Church and Christ Church Anglican.

Who are we together? How do we give a nod to the past, maintain our identities and establish a new "Title" for ourselves.

We won't be able to answer that question today.

Yet please know this. You are loved today more than you were yesterday, yet not as much as you'll be loved tomorrow.

If you ever think that nobody knows you; remember this; God knows you, loves you and has known you from the very beginning. Open your heart to a deeper, more meaningful relationship with the Divine.

As we are reminded in this morning's reading from Isaiah "The Lord called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb God named me." God knows you and loves you, just as you are.

Let the Church say - Amen!

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Elk Valley Ecumenical Shared Ministry  
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Sermon for the Second of Epiphany - 15 January 2023  
Isaiah 49.1-7, 1 Corinthians 1.1-9, John 1.29-42