

January 15, 2006
Psalm 139:1-18, 23-24, John 1:43-51
Dr. Lewis Galloway

“Greater Things Than These”

In his classic book, "To Know as We are Known," Parker Palmer laments the way in which true knowledge is so misunderstood in the modern world and true knowledge is so hard to achieve. We think we know only through our reason and what our five senses tell us. Palmer writes:

"Why assume that sensation and rationality are the only points of correspondence between the human self and the world? Why assume so, when the human self is rich with other capacities - intuition, empathy, emotion, and faith, to name but a few? If there is nothing to be known by these faculties, why do we have them?" (p. 52)

According to Palmer, when we depend only upon our reason and our five senses, we turn the people around us into objects and cannot see the mystery of their being. We dissect creation into its composite parts and make a mess of things by trying to conquer and control it.

True knowledge, knowledge that matters, is about relationships, respect, imagination and humility. We cannot know the other without knowing ourselves. We cannot know ourselves until we know the other. Palmer sees the moral and spiritual dimension to knowledge. He sees the church as a community of those who live in obedience to the truth.

According to the gospel of John, when Jesus calls the first disciples, he invites them to become part of a community of those who seek the truth. When Andrew hears John the Baptist point to Jesus as the Lamb of God, he and his companion follow Jesus. He asks Jesus where he is going, and Jesus says, "Come and see." That invitation begins a chain reaction that has continued to this present day. Jesus invites Philip to follow him. Then Philip invites Nathaniel. Philip believes Jesus is the Messiah about whom Moses and the prophets spoke. Each one invites others to "come and see" for themselves the truth they have seen in Jesus.

When Philip invites Nathaniel to meet Jesus, Nathaniel is skeptical. He wonders out loud if anything of any great significance can come out of a small, insignificant town like Nazareth. When he arrives, he quickly drops his skepticism. Nathaniel, who comes to see Jesus, is the one who is seen in his innermost being by Jesus. Jesus says of Nathaniel, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit." Nathaniel wonders how Jesus knows him. Jesus tells him that he saw him sitting under a fig tree. Nathaniel realizes that the one he has come to see has seen into his own heart.

There is someone who knows us better than we know ourselves. There is someone who sees into the depth of our being and knows the ultimate truth of our existence. In a moment's encounter with Jesus, Nathaniel experiences the truth of the Psalmist's words:

O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You discern my thoughts from far away. You search out my path and my lying down, And are acquainted with all my ways...Such knowledge is too wonderful for me.

Indeed, such knowledge is too wonderful for Nathaniel. The awareness of being known by God transforms his skepticism and his uncertainty. He cries out to Jesus, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel." As Christine Pohl has written, "Nothing but an encounter with the divine could explain their mutual recognition and this unusual interchange of knowing and being known, seeing and being seen." ("Living By the Word," *The Christian Century*, p. 21, January 10, 2006).

To know that we are known by God is to be transformed by God. We spend so much of our lives wondering who we are, what value our lives have, and for what purpose we are living. All too many people live their lives feeling as if their lives are insignificant, questioning their self-worth, laboring under the burden of low self-esteem. To know that we are known by God is to know the truth of our lives. It is to know that we are beloved of God and called to live a life of deep communion with God.

Do you remember, in the gospel of John, the story of the woman Jesus encounters at a well? She is a Samaritan woman, rejected by five husbands and scorned by her people. She is forced to draw water in the noonday heat. By asking her for a drink of water, Jesus breaks all the social taboos. He wants to know her and he wants her to know him. Unlike everybody else in her life, he treats her as more than someone to be pushed around, ordered about and rejected. He wants to establish a relationship with her. He reveals himself to her as the Messiah. She declares to others, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!" She sees him as the Messiah. Her life is filled with living water. In knowing him, she knows herself to be a child of God. Jesus wants us to come and see the truth about him and the truth about our lives. He wants us to let go of our skepticism, our shame, our hurts and our disbelief. He wants us to see him as he is - the Savior of the world. He wants us to see ourselves as we are - beloved children of God.

This is the truth that we are given to know in the church, the community of faith. This is the truth we are compelled to share with others when we, too, exclaim, "Come and see."

This knowledge of the truth puts us on a journey. Jesus says to Nathaniel, "You will see greater things than these. You will see the very heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." Jesus is saying to Nathaniel, "You haven't seen anything yet! Just wait! There are going to be days when everything makes sense, as if you see the angels and you are in the very presence of God."

When Jesus promises Nathaniel that he "will see greater things than these," he means more than seeing other examples of his ability to perceive things that the disciples cannot see. He means more than his divine power to do things they cannot do. He is talking about more

than the miracles he will perform or the crowds that will flock to hear him. Jesus is talking about more than the mountain top experiences they will know. Jesus is talking about seeing the purposes of God in all these things, in all these places and in all the circumstances of our lives. He is talking about being able to see, beneath the surface of things, the movement of God's mighty Spirit. He is talking about seeing the world's rejection of Jesus as the means of the world's salvation. He is talking about seeing his crucifixion as the means through which he is lifted up and glorified. He is talking about seeing the angels of God when all that the world sees is death.

He is talking about seeing the holy and beautiful nature of your life when the world says your life doesn't matter or what you do doesn't make any difference to anyone. He is talking about seeing that all the troubles, the disappointments and even the defeats of our lives can be the means through which Jesus is glorified and God's plans are accomplished. To know the truth is to know that even the wounded and broken places of life can be the very places where God's healing grace and forgiving Spirit are most visible. The final truth is that every moment of life, everything we have ever done, or said, or tried, or failed, or given, or lost or gained, is a holy moment from God's point of view.

On the day before he was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke to the striking city sanitation workers. In his last speech, Dr. King was able to see the Spirit of God at work in the brokenness of the world. In his speech, he wondered out loud when would be the best time in human history to live. He declared that he is happy to live now, in this present time. King said:

Now that's a strange statement to make, because the world is all messed up. The nation is sick. Trouble is in the land. Confusion is all around.... But I know, somehow, that only when it is dark enough, can you see the stars. And I see God working in this period of the twentieth century in a way that causes men, in some strange way, to respond - something is happening in our world.

Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life... But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land. And I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.

He had seen greater things than racial hatred or even the threats on his life. You might say that he had seen "the angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

The invitation is to come and see. Come and see Jesus. When we see him, we see that Jesus knows us better than we know ourselves. The truth that we come to know in Jesus transforms us. Jesus calls us to journey with him ever more deeply into the truth - the truth that will set us free and make us whole. As we journey, we will see greater things than we have ever imagined. We will see God moving in all the good and bad circumstances of our

lives, in all the strange and familiar places of our lives and in all the blessed and mournful times of our lives.

Search me, O God, and know my heart;

Test me and know my thoughts.

See if there is any wicked way in me,

And lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23, 24)

This is the Truth. The gospel Truth. Come and see.