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Christ Lutheran Church, Ferndale, WA
Fourth Sunday of Easter
April 25, 2021
Acts 4:5-12, Ps. 23, I John 3:16-24; John 10:11-18

I don't know if you had the same reaction today when you heard the gospel text from John 10, but there's a line in that gospel that when I really think about what it means, it makes me want to crawl into a hole and cover my head. It's the line from verses 14 and 15: Jesus says, "I *know* my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father." Now I'm sure it sounds strange that those words would make me want to crawl into a hole, but just think about this: Jesus knows us as intimately, completely, and wholly as God knows Jesus and Jesus knows God, which as we know is as intimate, complete, and whole as you can get, since Jesus was God in the flesh.

But since Jesus knows us intimately, completely, and wholly, what *that* means is that Jesus knows all the stuff about me that I'm embarrassed and ashamed about—all those things which I've thought or done or haven't done well enough and would never want anyone else to know, Jesus knows those things. I can think back to times in my life all the way back to being a teenager that make me shudder to know that Jesus knows all those things about me. Maybe you too think back to or are right now living your teenage years and feel a similar sense of shame.

But shame doesn't know any boundaries of age. If you've ever thought any of the following statements at any point in your life, you've probably felt that same kind of shame:

I feel that if people who admire me *really* knew me, they would totally reject me.

I feel like sometimes I'm a fraud.

When I look inside myself, I hardly feel any happiness about who I am.

I feel as if I will never be acceptable.

I feel as if God must be disgusted with me.

I remember once I invited an author to speak to a group I was in charge of and I was mortified when a handful of group members sat back with their arms folded and scowls on their faces when they were listening to her—they clearly didn't like the author and what she was saying.

When I apologized to the author about it, she said to me, "Oh that's normal. Whenever I speak to a group, I expect that 20% of the people will think I'm awesome and walk on water, 60% of the people will think, yea, she's pretty good and will learn something from me, and 20% of the people won't like me and won't learn a thing from me. You just can't get bogged down by that last 20%."

How many of us, though, focus on that last 20% of people who may not like us or accept us? How many of us get hung up on thinking that we are wrong people because of wrong things we may have done or left undone in the past? How many of us are mortified that Jesus knows more about us than anyone else does, and therefore knows our inevitable faults, weaknesses, and wrongdoings. Jesus *knowing* us, then, becomes a conviction rather than a life-giving promise.

In this gospel Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep.” There’s an important little word in there—the word “and.” *And* I lay my life down for the sheep. You see, Jesus as our good shepherd *does* know us, like it says in 1 John 3 that we heard today: “God is greater than our hearts, and God knows everything.” God in Jesus knows everything about us...*and* Jesus still loves us and lays down his life for us. Again from 1 John 3: “We know love by this, that Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.”

Jesus Christ loves us and laid down his life for us, despite and *because of* all he knows about us, including all the embarrassment and shame we hold inside. There is no possible way that we can rid ourselves of that shame all by ourselves. But we can experience transformation through the greatest gift God has ever given the world—the gift of grace in Jesus Christ. Grace is the reality that we are accepted even when we or others find ourselves unacceptable. Grace is the gift of being so deeply known that the one who loves us sees that at our core we are child created in God’s image and therefore worthy of God’s unconditional love and acceptance.

Jesus knowing us—knowing *all* about us—is not something to fear, not something that should make us want to crawl into a hole, but rather something to rejoice in. What if we sang the song that many of us learned as children, “Jesus Loves Me, This I Know” with one little change, replacing “loves” with “knows” — “Jesus knows me this I know.” Sing it with me... Jesus knows you, knows everything about you, and loves, accepts, and saves you, even when you are weak, because he is strong.

And so the next time you come across those 20% of people who may not like you or accept you, or the next time you think you are not deserving of love, remember Jesus, your good shepherd who would even go to the extent of laying down his life for you. And isn’t that all that really matters. Amen.