

SEESION 2 - HOW DO WE KNOW GOD?

WELCOME & INTRODUCTION

- Last week we considered how everything (creation) came into existence, and what that might tell us about God and our knowledge of him. For Christians, we believe that God shows himself to us in creation, and through his son, Jesus Christ. God wants to be known, to be in relationship with us – what an amazing gift!
- In today's session we are asking more closely the question of how we can know God and how God makes himself known to us.
- **Opening Q.** => Do we know what biblical scene this painting by Rembrandt depicts? The painting was made prominent by Christian writer and priest Henri Nouwen, who meditated upon this painting, and from it, wrote a renowned spiritual book. For Nouwen, the painting (and the biblical story it paints) is highly representative of our spiritual journeys.



BIBLE READING: Luke 15.11-32

- **Q.** => Of the three main characters in this story, do you resonate with any of them? All of them? None of them? Some of them?
- **Q.** => Do any verses stand out?
- **Q.** => The passage emphasises themes of 'home', 'family', on God as 'Father' – how do these themes/terms make you feel? Do they feel loaded?
- This bible passage speaks of our deep need for God, and the deep need all of us have to know his love for us. It also depicts, how, in various ways, the character of the 'Father' (of God) is the one reaching out and searching for his children to come back to him. He loves them first.
- In response, Henri Nouwen writes: *'Now I wonder whether I have sufficiently realized that God has been trying to find me, to know me, and to love me. The question is not "How am I to find God?" but "How am I to let myself be found by him?" The question is not "How am I to know God?" but "How am I to let myself be known by God?" And, finally, the question is not "How am I to love God?" but "How am I to let myself be loved by God?" God is looking into the distance for me, trying to find me, and longing to bring me home.'*
- **Our knowledge of God, then, is often found in how we come to see God's prior actions and movements towards us. Our knowledge of God is done in the context of a relationship with him, of a response we make to his love for us.**
- **Q.s** => How do we let ourselves be known and loved? What might make this difficult? Where might we struggle to know God's love for us, and to respond to him in turn?

THE WALLS WE & OTHERS BUILD

- Christians believe that sin can obscure our knowing of God and our relationship with him, because through sin, distance is formed between us and God; walls go up, and we can struggle to know that love that is always reaching out to us.
- There may even be walls between us and God that we think are means by which we have a close relationship with him. Look at the elder son in the story – physically close with the Father,

but emotionally far away (drawn into comparison with the younger son, ends up jealous because of a sense of entitlement). We too might find ourselves repeating such ideas in our own lives (trying to prove our place, comparison with others).

- Nouwen puts it like this: *'The farther I run away from the place where God dwells, the less I am able to hear the voice that calls me the Beloved, and the less I hear that voice, the more entangled I become in the manipulations and power games of the world.'* Both sons are distant to their father in the passage, and the father calls them differently to come back to know his love for them and for each other.
- **Q. => What other 'walls' can we think of? In the modern world: power, politics, money ... searching for love where it cannot be found**
- The good news is that God ALWAYS love us, welcomes us and accepts when we want to return to him. From the place of knowing his love for us, we can come to know him and love him more and more.

KNOWING GOD/LETTING OURSELVES BE KNOWN

- How do we let ourselves be known and loved? Let's discuss some ways:

Creation: In creation, we see God as our provider, bringing life and beauty into the world. How can spending time in the natural world (even in our gardens!) show us something of God's love for us? Can we respond in how we choose to care for the world?

Bible: In the Bible, God is revealed to humanity, principally in Christ, God's gift of his son, and the continuing gift of his Holy Spirit. What is our relationship with the Bible?

Church: The church is more than a building – it is a place of community, of worship (principally through the sacraments), of prayer. The church exists for our parish – a place where everyone is welcome and invited to hear the good news of God's love for them.

Prayer: Whenever (or if) we pray, do we ever think of it as being a response to God? A response to God's hello. Prayer is the gift of communing with God in relationship, being honest, coming into the presence of one who knows you and love you.

One another: Our relationships with one another, fellow Christians, people in our communities can witness to God's care towards us.

CLOSING REFLECTIONS & PRAYER

- Any final thoughts/comments/questions?
- **Our spiritual lives are done in the context of relationships, and today, we're reminded that God reaches out to us, and knowing his love for us is the heart of our relationship with him.**

*Love bade me welcome; yet my soul drew back
Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
If I lack'd anything.*

*'A guest,' I answer'd, 'worthy to be here:'
Love said, 'You shall be he.'
'I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear,
I cannot look on Thee.'
Love took my hand and smiling did reply,
'Who made the eyes but I?'*

*'Truth, Lord; but I have marr'd them: let my shame
Go where it doth deserve.'
'And know you not,' says Love, 'Who bore the blame?'
'My dear, then I will serve.'
'You must sit down,' says Love, 'and taste my meat.'
So I did sit and eat."*

George Herbert: Love (iii)

**God of Love, we thank you for the gift of creation
and your presence with us in the world around us.
We long to know you more,
that we may walk with you and you with us,
discerning your presence with us and meeting you in bread and wine.
Grant that as we journey together,
we may grow in our knowledge of you and your enduring love for us.
This we ask in your Holy and wonderful name, world without end, Amen.**

