

Epiphany 2 Year B – January 17, 2021
I Samuel 3:1-20; Psalm 139; John 1:43-51
Epiphany, Winnipeg

You might have noticed this: Samuel, a young boy of maybe 12 years, doesn't know that God is calling him. Well, who would? If you're in a place with one other person and you wake up at night to the sound of someone calling your name, you wouldn't just think it's God. You'd just say to whoever's in the room, "Yes? You called?"

Samuel doesn't know it's God. Three times God says, "Samuel, Samuel!", and three times Samuel goes to his teacher - a priest named Eli - and says, "Yes, you called?" And Eli says, "Nope. Now go back to bed." Samuel doesn't know. Eli the priest, who is old and getting older and should know better, doesn't know that it's God calling. He doesn't even know God, so the story goes.

But God keeps calling, and finally Eli understands, and then he helps Samuel understand. And all that while, when neither of them knew that it was God, God knew them. Knew them by name. Called them by name. Knew them by name. And that's what really mattered.

Or you might have noticed this: We read Psalm 139 together with Elaine, and we heard this beautiful piece of poetry poured out to the God who knows us before we know God and who knows us even before we could know ourselves. "You have searched me out, God, and known me, you know when I sit and stand and lie down, you know my thoughts, you're all around me." If we'd read the whole thing we'd be saying, "O God, everywhere I go you are there – the heights, the depths, the east and the west, in the night and the day, you see and you know.

It sounds OK...but maybe you don't want God to know where you've been. Have you ever wanted to get away so no one knows where you are, or to hide because you don't want to be known? Or maybe I don't want God to know what's on my mind at any given time, because sometimes it's not so great. But there it is: God, you've searched me out and known me, and wherever I go you're already there.

Or maybe you hear it the other way - and it's OK if we all hear it differently. Maybe you sometimes feel alone, like you're lost at sea, or you're lost in the night, or you feel like you're sinking into the depths and will be lost there. Or you're just so far from home. Any of us, I'm sure, might sometimes think we're alone and that no one really knows us. I've felt that way in a far away country halfway around the world, on a train packed full of strangers; I've felt that in my high school or my hometown or sometimes even the house where I live. I'll go out on a limb and guess that it's been like that for most of us sometime. Maybe all of us.

But God knows you. And me. And us.

Just like God knows you even if everyone else calls you one of those street people, or just one of those rich people in an office, or just a taxpayer or consumer, or just a COVID case or an account number or a badge number...God knows you by name. God knows each of us by name, knows us all together by name, knows us long before we knew God, knows us better than we know ourselves, and loves us better than we're ever able to love ourselves.

And when we sang the psalm some more we told of a God who has knit us together; fearfully and mysteriously and wonderfully put us together. With the care and attention of a carver with a chisel or a weaver and a loom, or an engineer with a schematic or a gardener with some seeds and some soil. God has put us

together...wonderfully...mysteriously...fearfully (in an awesome kind of way, not a scary way.)

It's easy to say that and to see it if we're thinking of someone we love, or someone who we at least think is loveable. But did you know that you are fearfully and wonderfully made? Did people storming the doors and breaking the windows in Washington last week know that they are fearfully and wonderfully made, intricately woven in the depths by their God, by our God? Did their fearless leader – or their terrified leader – know that weird and beautiful truth about being crafted with such love and attention by the God who made it all? Did lawmakers hiding under benches and behind doors know it?

What if we learned to see everyone that way? And to know that God has known them, us, me, you, before we could know God or even know ourselves? What if we looked around with new eyes that only see mysteriously and wonderfully made, all around us?

And maybe you noticed this: Jesus starts the day looking around and calling a few people to join him, to follow along. He sees someone named Nathanael sitting under that tree over there, and he knows Nathanael. When they finally meet Jesus as much as says, "I know you." And Nathanael says "How did you know me?" And Jesus says I saw you under that tree over there and I knew you already."

Did you see it? It happened again. Before Nathanael knew Jesus, Jesus knew Nathanael. We heard it again: It's not what you know, it's who knows you, it's who knows us, knows us long before we could know, and loves us long before and always after.

You'll have received e-mail about this already, so it's probably not fresh news by now. Next week – if everything happens according to plan – we're going to start having communion again. We won't be in the building yet, we'll still be scattered here and there, but we talked about it at council the other night and we agreed that now's the right time. Maybe God knew that months ago, long before us. Who knows? But it seems like it's the right time.

Way back at the start we held off on some kind of online communion, because for some of us – especially pastors – it just didn't seem right to have communion if we're not together being a community here. But now it's just settling in that this is how we're a community now. By Zoom. Over the phone. On YouTube. By e-mail. From the end of the driveway. At a distance we are community. And God knows us – as a community – even scattered around as we are. And God can take a community that is scattered to the heights and the depths and to the east and the west, and keep on weaving it together with some bread and some wine, with the Body and Blood of Christ who knows us already and so well, wherever we are. Just like God keeps taking a world so scattered and broken and distant, and weaves it together, keeps on making it, mysteriously, and wonderfully, knitting it together, knitting us together.

It's like one of our council members put it, most clearly: “God knows us and knows what's going on with us and inside us.” Isn't that always the most important thing? God knows us. Knew us long before we knew that. Jesus knows us, has known us from so long ago. And the one who knows us is already there, wherever we are. And the one who knows us feeds us, and loves us, and calls us, and weaves us and the whole creation together. AMEN