

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Pentecost 16
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Sermon by Pastor Justin Gran
Get to know Jesus

—2 Peter 3:1-18

In any relationship you have, it is vital to get to know the other person. It starts with the most basic information like, “What’s your name? Where are you from?” If the relationship is to grow and deepen, that involves getting to know a person even more. If the relationship is to move beyond a casual acquaintance and become a close friendship, you have to really get to know the person. What makes that person tick? What makes him happy? What gets under her skin? What has he been through? As you get to know the person better, the relationship grows.

The relationship we’re talking about today is our relationship to God. Knowing Jesus is the key to having a relationship with God. There is no way we could ever ascend to God to truly know him. But he has come to us. He stooped down to us and made himself know in Jesus Christ. If you want to know God, I mean really know him and move beyond the basics; if you want to know what he’s like; if you want to know what pleases him and displeases him, then you have to get to know Jesus.

That’s the gist of the Apostle Peter in his second letter—get to know Jesus. In the opening words of 2 Peter, he writes, “**Grace and peace to you in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.**” Grace and peace with God only come from knowing Jesus. And then he ends his short letter, “**Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.**” Get to know Jesus.

So, let me ask you— How well do you know Jesus? I don’t want you to be embarrassed by that question. Some of you are just getting to know him if you’re newer to the faith. Others have known Jesus for most of your life. Either way, God’s grace and peace flow abundantly and all the same whether you’re young in your faith or mature in your faith. Also, in either case, there’s always room to grow. Whether you’re pushing 90 years or just a few weeks, there is room and there is need to get to know Jesus and to get to know him better.

Any relationship requires maintenance. If you want it to be a lasting relationship, you don’t take it for granted or set it on autopilot. It needs to be nurtured. Also, in any relationship, there are barriers that need to be overcome in order to strengthen the relationship. The biggest barrier is our self. Our selfish tendencies that strain other relationships may also strain our relationship with Jesus. For example, if someone is talking to me and I’m listening only with a selfish ear, I might be tempted to look for ways to make the conversation focus more on me. Or in mid sentence I may hijack the conversation and push my own agenda. In the same way if I’m listening to Jesus’ words with only a selfish heart, I may be tempted to put undue focus on me. If he’s talking about what pleases him or benefits my neighbor, I might nod along while in the background I’m thinking, “What about me? What does this have to do with me?” That kind of listening is selfish and damaging in any relationship.

Another example: what if I draw a false conclusion about you because instead of getting my information from you directly, I listen to third-party chatter or gossip about you? Then I have a tainted view of you, and wrongfully so. The chatter and accusations of scoffers and skeptics in our world may tempt us to draw false conclusions about Jesus and doubt his integrity. That was already a problem in Peter’s day. He said, “**First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires, they will say, ‘Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.’**” If we listen to enough of that scoffing and skepticism, maybe we start to wonder, “Where is Jesus? Is he really in touch with this world and my life? Does he really care?” That’s not fair to Jesus if I form my opinion of him based on what other people claim instead of listening to him.

We need to know Jesus as he wants himself to be known and understood, not as we want him to understand him. There are a lot of false ideas out there about who Jesus is. We don’t need to know Jesus so he can be our life coach—someone to give us pointers along the way and lead us to success. We don’t need to know Jesus so he can be like a good luck charm—something that promises prosperity. We don’t need to know Jesus so that he can be like that friend who tells us what we want to hear. We need to know Jesus because he is coming to be our judge. That’s how Peter describes him. He will come like a thief and put an end to the present heavens and earth and to expose, to uncover hearts and deeds of every single person.

On that day, it is absolutely vital that you know Jesus, and I mean really know him. To really know him is to believe in him as he has made himself known; not according to our own conceptions of who is or. We need to

know Jesus because when he comes again the table will be turned. To whomever has failed to know or refused to know Jesus in this life, on that day Jesus will say, "I don't know you."

In preparation for that day, get to know Jesus. **"Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."** Peter wrote that encouragement. This is the same guy who decades earlier stood outside in the High Priest's courtyard and swore to God that he didn't know Jesus. But the next time he saw Jesus, Jesus didn't give Peter a cold look and say, "I don't know you!" He said, **"Peace be with you!"** Before Jesus comes as the righteous judge remember that he has come as your merciful Savior. He has come to make God's forgiveness and love known to you. He comes through his word and his sacraments to let you know that you have peace with God through Jesus Christ.

Get to know him. Continue to get to know him. Even though people today as in Peter's day scoff and say, "Where is God? His promises and threats are empty." But remember this, **"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."** This is why God has made himself known through Jesus Christ. He wants no one to perish. He wants everyone to come to repentance. He wants you and everyone else to know Jesus and have eternal life in his name.

Remember and know this about Jesus: He is patient. Don't mistake his patience for indifference. Don't mistake his mercy for a license to live however you please. See the Lord's patience as a time of grace—an opportunity to repent and turn from our selfish ways that deny and distort Jesus Christ, and see him for who he really is. Get to know him. Who is he? He's the Son of God and in him the fullness of God lives in bodily form. Where is he from? He's from eternity sent by his Father to make the love of God known. What's he been through? He's experienced pain and sorrow and temptation. He's even been to hell and death and back for your sake. What pleases him? He loves to do his Father's will. He rejoices when one person turns to him in true repentance and lives in the peace and forgiveness he offers. And who is Jesus to you? He calls you friend. He calls you brother or sister. And most importantly he is your robe of righteousness that covers you so that you can stand before God spotless and blameless even now and especially on Judgment day. That's how we know Jesus; as he has made himself known.

Get to know Jesus. When I say that I am in no way saying that you don't know him already. To believe in Jesus is to know Jesus. You know Jesus. And because you know his grace, he is near and dear to you. He's not just some old friend who's drifted away. He's not just a casual acquaintance to be lumped into one part of your life. In fact the relationship between each believer and Jesus is compared to a marriage. I'd like to think that most people who are married would say that they know their spouse pretty well. The other day I asked someone who has been married for over forty years, "Would you say that you know your husband pretty well?" She wasn't offended and she didn't laugh it off, in all seriousness, she said, "Yeah, but you know what, just the other day I learned that he doesn't like the movie Star Wars. All those years I never knew that!" There's room for growth. What if strive to do the same with Jesus? We confess our faith in Jesus and say, "Of course I know him! But you know what, the other day I found this Bible passage that stated God's grace and love in a new way. All those years, I never thought of it like that." In that simple way of listening to Jesus as he speaks to you in his word, get to know him better each day so that you can stand firm in him until he comes. **Grow in the grace and knowledge of your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.**