Text: Genesis 18:17, 20-33 and Luke 11:1-13

**Introduction**

How does one know God?

In some ways it might seem like a silly question. There are those who would say that it is impossible to know God. Even Martin Luther would have his moments of talking about the hidden God. The God we cannot see who is always hiding behind masks. The Apostle Paul of course would say that you know God by looking out your window. “For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.” The problem with knowing God that way is what Paul ends that verse with. “So they are without excuse. (Rom. 1:20 ESV)” The demons know God in that way. Arguably they have perceived even more of God and would therefore know him better. The God of the Philosophers is not to be mocked. But that type of knowledge doesn’t really get us very far. Call it knowing God as information.

Now there is a stronger answer. We can know God in how he has revealed himself. The knowledge of God that is available to all peoples is contained in the Scriptures and the incarnation of Jesus Christ which the Scriptures testify to. This is what is captured in the creeds and is the true beginning of faith. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. God has revealed himself and given testimony about himself. And has told us what his purpose is – the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life of the world to come. And honestly I think this is a very common knowledge of God. Close enough to the fire to be warm, but not so close as to get burned.

But I think our texts today are an invitation to a deeper knowledge of God.

**Text**

I want to start with the Old Testament lesson. If you’ve been with us on Wednesdays reading Genesis you might recall a bit. Abraham had a vision of the LORD who called him to leave his home, and family and country and go to a far place that this God would give him. Abraham – simply Abram at that point – doesn’t know this God from any other gods. But Abraham takes God at his word, he has faith in his promise, and he packs up everything and heads out. Abraham knew God has he had revealed himself. But as the story plays out God keeps promising things, and those things just don’t seem to happen. So Abraham and Sarah keep coming up with new ways that God might keep his promises. Lot, Eliezer, Hagar and Ishmael. But none of those are the way God will keep his promise. And each attempt just makes the story a little tougher.

Then one day three strangers arrive. Abraham recognizes them as The LORD and hastily prepares a meal and satisfies the needs of hospitality. The LORD is finally ready to fulfill the promise. Sarah will have a child within the year. There are laughs had about this, but God’s promise stands. But the three get up to leave Abraham’s tents and they say right before our lesson starts, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, (Gen. 18:17 ESV).” He is staring in the distance at Sodom and Gomorrah and contemplating their destruction. But what God is contemplating is: do I let Abraham, my chosen, in on everything?

Let me assert something here. People up until this time might make sacrifices – sacrifices of thanks or sacrifices of persuasion – they might even make petitions of a god. They would carry out the orders of the gods. But to enter into conversation with God is new. To enter into conversation is to know God in yet another way. It is to learn about God in a personal way. The Scriptures are for everyone. And those scriptures norm or govern any private or personal experience. If a god in conversation contradicts the scriptures it is not THE LORD. But entering into exactly that type of conversation with Abraham is what The LORD was contemplating. And He did. God opened himself up to personal conversation. To sharing what he was about to do.

And Abraham’s reaction I think is in a bit of horror. Exactly what type of God have I followed and hitched my wagon to? They turned and west toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD. “Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?” And Abraham to me kinda spells out the GOD he thought he was following. “Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked…shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?”

I need to know you closer. Who are you God?

Now Abraham had put a number on the mixture – 50 righteous. And God tells him if I find 50 I will spare the city. Over the course of the lesson Abraham keeps conversing with God. The power disparity is plain. God has all the power. Wherever is His limit is who his is. But the fact is that Abraham’s negotiation never reaches God’s limit. Abraham is content with 10. Maybe that is because he’s confident that Lot and family should equal 10. Ten also happens to the Jewish minyan, the number of adults necessary to have a quorum for worship, although that might come about later. Maybe he just can’t imagine such a city not having 10.

Abraham is content with this personal knowledge of the mercy of God.

**Christology**

But we know that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed. God did not find 10. But God did not destroy the city because there were only 9, sorry guys. The fact is that no one in the way Abraham was negotiating is righteous. Not one. We have all been found guilty under the law. That doesn’t mean all sins are the same. “Because the outcry against Sodom is great and their sin very grave” is the report to God that has spurred this. But if our righteousness is measured by the law we are all guilty.

The flip side of the totality of the law is the mercy of God. Abraham was content with 10. He could have bargained to one. If you find one righteous person. God has spared all of creation because of one righteous person. And that one didn’t really come from among us, but God sent his only son into this World. Born of the virgin Mary. The righteous one through whom many might be saved. And we know God by how he did this. He gave his life on that cross. That the entire world might not be destroyed, Christ went to the cross.

**Moral**

And it is this Christ who is the friend of sinners. It is this Christ who bids us to pray. To converse with him. To know God in a personal way.

I don’t know about you, maybe I’m just a bit to cynical, but when I read: “which of you who has a friend will go to him a midnight and ask and he will say “don’t bother me, go away”…why response is well, pretty much all of them. And the sadder part is the later part when he asks abour Fathers and Sons. And while my answer might not be quite as cynical, you can’t look at the world today and not immediately think of plenty of serpents and scorpions given.

But you do have a friend – Jesus, friend of sinners who is always willing. Not just because of impudence, but from love. And you do have a Father, the Heavently Father, who out our pure Fatherly divine goodness and mercy longs to give you everything you need.

And you will know the providence of the Father and the love of Jesus. You will personally know God when you ask. “Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door is open.”

God knows you. He made you. He’s redeemed you. He is sanctifying you. God wants you to know him. And he wants you to know him as the Friend of Sinners, as the Good Father. And that is the purpose of prayer. Everything we pray for God knows that we need. God is going to do everything needful. The daily bread will not be withheld. Your sins have been forgiven.

But as Luther says about the Kingdom. The Kingdom certainly comes without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it comes to us also. That kingdom in the personal knowledge of God in your heart. That Kingdom in the gift of the Holy Spirit to those who ask. That Kingdom is knowing the king personally.

That is the invitation to prayer. Ask. Get to know your LORD personally. Amen.