

"Let us know the LORD" Hosea 6:3 / Joshua 23:6 / John 14:6-10 (09/01/2024)

I have a friend who lives in Texas. He is one of my best friends. We have known each other since 2004. Even though we had been friends for 20 years, we had been together for only 3 months. We first met when I went to the church in New Zealand. I was not a Christian then, but he grew up in a Methodist family and was a student with great faith.

He was a person who really helped me become a Christian. He spent his time and energy to become friends with me even though I told the church I did not want to be a Christian. After I decided to come to the church, he taught me a lot about Christian life. He taught me how a Christian should pray and read the Bible and introduced me to many Christian books. He also took me to many church events to make me be with the church people.

After 3 months, he went to the United States to study in university. We could not meet as usual, but we still kept in touch and had a lot of conversations about Christian faith and church ministry.

Time is not important in getting to know somebody or something. The time is not a matter of getting to know someone. It means that spending a lot of time with someone does not mean you get to know someone well. As we saw in the video today,

even though they were fathers and children, fathers did not know about their children well. It seems the interview was done in Hollywood. We can assume that their relationship is not bad. They might have a family trip to Hollywood. Fathers probably had been with their children since their children were born. However, the fathers in the video knew a lot about their interests. Still, they could not remember the son's girlfriend's name even though it was explained two minutes ago. So, time does not guarantee a deep relationship with somebody. We should spend a lot of energy getting to know someone.

I believe the relationship between God and us is the same. I think time does not guarantee that someone knows a lot about God. I do not think that someone knows a lot about God just because they were born a Christian and have been attending church for a long time. Just because we go to church for a long time does not mean we naturally get to know God. As prophet Hosea said, "Let us press on to know the LORD," "Let us do our best to know the LORD."

In Hosea 1:1, the Bible says, "The word of the LORD that came to Hosea, the son of Beerai, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel." So, we know that Hosea was a prophet in the time of King Jeroboam. When King Jeroboam reigned in Israel,

he expanded the territory and strengthened the country's power. He brought economic growth to the country and made the country economically stable. Therefore, some scholars say the time of King Jeroboam, who was the son of Joash, was a golden age for Northern Israel. In this context, the prophet Hosea encouraged people to know God and to press on to know the LORD.

The golden age of Israel brought spiritual corruption to the people of Israel. Outwardly, the country was strong and rich, but spiritually, the people forgot about God. In Hosea 4:6, the Bible says, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children." Israel fell into idolatry and sins while they had the golden age. In this background, prophet Hosea shouted to the people of Israel, "Let us press on to know the LORD." Hosea did not just say, "Let us know God." He said, "Let us do our best to know the LORD." To know God, we should spend our energy. To know God, we should be interested in God.

Before we read Joshua chapter 23, we should remember Joshua chapter 1. When Joshua became the next leader of Israel after Moses, God just emphasized one thing to Joshua, "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you

shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it.” Then, Joshua says in chapter 23, “Therefore, be very strong to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right hand nor to the left.” Some Bible translations have the subtitle in Joshua chapter 23. Some say it is “The last words of Joshua.” And some say it is “Joshua’s farewell speech.” So, Joshua chapter 23 represents Joshua’s message to the next generation of Israel. At this time, Joshua was old, experienced a lot of things, and matured in God. He was the person who saw all works of God from Egypt to the promised land. He was the person who saw God’s work for the people of Israel to let them settle down in the promised land. This mature leader of Israel left the last message, “Be very strong to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses.” At this time, the Israelites could know God through the Book of the Law, so the last message of Joshua might imply, “Be very strong to know God.”

Personally, getting to know God was not a natural thing for me. I was not a Christian when I was a child, and I was not born into a Christian family, so I had to learn every Christian language, expressions, and habits after I became a Christian. I did not even know the meaning of “grace, mercy, Christ, etc.” When I first started going to church, I embarrassed my church people by asking difficult religious questions and arguments. After I decided to become a Christian, I embarrassed them

by asking basic and simple questions. I thought every Christian knew the answer to the question, “What is grace?” “What is faith?” because they often used those Christian words. After I had gone to the seminary, I realized that I had asked such difficult questions to my church people.

However, getting to know about God and Christianity was my great joy. My church family helped me a lot. Some church members spent a night answering my question. Youth group teachers studied a lot to answer my questions if they could not give me the answer directly when I asked questions. At that time, my church people and I did our best to know about God.

Then, how can we know God? God is almighty and unlimited. God is greater than anything we can imagine. Then, how can the limited human beings know God? We could know God because Jesus came to us. In today’s Gospel, Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.” This is a very special characteristic of Christianity compared to other religions. God came to us with the human body. God incarnated to be with us. Jesus came to us to let us know God. Through Jesus Christ, we can know God.

Today, Jesus prepared this Holy Table for us. In today's Gospel, Jesus also said to Philip, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip?" I do not want to hear the same words from Jesus. "Have I been with you so long, and you studied theology, and you preach every Sunday before the congregation, and you still do not know me, Paul?" I hope to know God. I hope to do my best to know God. I hope to press on to know the LORD. Through this Holy Table, let us remember Jesus. Let us know the sacrifice of Jesus. Through this Holy Communion, I hope we can restore our passion for knowing God. May God bless us and help us to become the church that does the best to know our gracious God. Amen.