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This morning I would like to start today’s message by sharing a story of Socrates, a great Greek philosopher. One day Chaerephon, a friend of Socrates, went to the temple of Apollo at Delphi and asked the priest whether there was someone smarter than Socrates in Athens.

The priest answered that no one was smarter than Socrates, but Socrates didn’t believe his friend’s story because there were many brilliant people in the city. So he tried to prove that the Oracle wasn’t correct by finding someone cleverer than him.

But, in the course of meeting and talking to many wise people who had exceptional intellectual ability, Socrates realised that no one knew perfectly what they claimed to know; in addition, they weren’t aware of the fact that they didn’t know everything.

So, then, he began to understand the meaning of the Oracle; the reason the priest said that Socrates was the smartest in the city was because Socrates was the only one who knew the limitations of his own knowledge.

This short story shows that real knowledge is based on the recognition that I don’t comprehend well. Only those people who recognise their understanding is limited or imperfect can have a desire for further knowledge, and this will lead them to seek and study ceaselessly to get accurate knowledge.

In this respect, Socrates argued that “the only true wisdom is in knowing that you know nothing.” Thus, he always challenged his people, “Know thyself,” ‘Realise that you understand nothing.’

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I believe that Socrates’ teaching of knowing is true even in knowing God. Who can recognise God? Only those who acknowledge that they don’t comprehend God can discern God because they seek him earnestly; only those who are thirsty for God can find the beauty of his presence in all aspects of life.

So, God claimed through the prophet Isaiah as follows: “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk without money and cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare.”

Yes, only those who are hungry for understanding God can plunge themselves into the deep water of divine knowledge. In the same vein, Jesus proclaimed, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.”

On the contrary, people who think that they already know God stop their truth seeking journey and settle down with their limited experiences. They believe that they have the right knowledge of God, so don't ask, seek, and knock the doors of new possibilities. Consequently, their understanding of God becomes fossilised and fragmented.

Knowing God is essential in the Christian religion. What's remarkable is that in today's Gospel reading Jesus described knowing God as eternal life. John 17:3 says, “Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”

This saying is surprising because it provides a new concept of eternal life. Not only at that time but also nowadays, lots of people were likely to regard eternal life as getting to heaven after death, but Jesus challenged this idea. Then, why did Jesus say that knowing God is eternal life? From this, we can learn Jesus' understanding of God.

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First of all, we need to focus on the Greek word, ‘γινώσκω’ (Ginosko), used by Jesus in the passage. Ginosko contains the meaning of ‘know,’ but its meaning is different from the English meaning of knowing. The Oxford Dictionary defines the word ‘know’ as “being aware of through observation, inquiry, or information.”

The Cambridge Dictionary explains the act of knowing as “to have information in your mind.” Likewise, in English, when we say that we know something, it means that we have some information through intellectual activities like observing, listening, or reading.

However, Ginosko doesn't only mean such intellectual comprehension. Rather the act of Ginosko also signifies comprehending something by experience. That is, to know God means experiencing God personally and holistically. We can get information about God by listening to Sunday-School teachers or ministers, reading some books, or attending some conferences.

But, if our understanding of God isn't grounded in our experiencing God in our life journey, such theoretical knowledge might easily disappear. Such information has limited impact on our ways of thinking and living, and so we cannot introduce God to others. How can we explain God confidently without encountering him personally?

“Anne of Green Gables” written by Lucy Montgomery is one of my favourite novels. In that book, there is an interesting story about ice cream. Anne was an orphan, so hadn't had any opportunity to taste ice cream before. One day she heard that at the Sunday-School picnic, teachers would make ice cream.

Anne was so excited that she couldn't wait for the picnic. At that scene, Anne told Marilla, the woman who had adopted her: “I have never tasted ice cream. Diana (my friend) tried to explain what it was like, but I guess ice cream is one of those things that are beyond imagination.”

Although Anne could memorise her friend's explanation of ice cream, such information would be out-of-context until she tasted it for herself. Likewise, knowing God means meeting him personally and experiencing his amazing grace in reality. Then, only then, can our knowledge of God impact on us, and we can then accept God into the centre of our life. Yes, this is eternal life.

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To acknowledge God, we also need to focus on the name, Jesus Christ, in the scripture. As we read earlier, in verse 3 Jesus argued, “Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” Normally reading this we don't notice Jesus' intention to attach his name, but this contains a key theological point in understanding God.

For his being as the Messiah is very important for human beings to discern God. John Calvin, a great Reformer, claimed that people cannot comprehend God

unless he reveals himself because of the ontological and existential gulf between God and human beings.

Karl Barth, an influential theologian, also argued that only God’s revelation can bridge the qualitative gulf. God’s self-revelation is the only foundation for understanding God. For him, the highlight of God’s revelation was the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

He maintained that we can only understand God through Jesus Christ. The apostle Peter also proclaimed: “Jesus is ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.’ Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

The Christocentric theology has been a core principle of Christianity focusing on God as Trinity. However, nowadays, the Christ-centred discourse has been challenged a lot both inside and outside the church in this multicultural and multi-religious context. Some argue that we can perceive God only through Jesus Christ, but others say we can get to God without Jesus. What do you think?

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Sisters and brothers,

We are living in a post-Christendom society, in which knowledge of God is ignored or undervalued. Even Christians don’t ask, seek, and knock on the gate of the truth; churches are rapidly declining, and the name of Jesus is being replaced by Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, and other fictional characters.

It is like the era of Eli described in the book of 1 Samuel. 1 Samuel 3:1 says, “This was at a time when the revelation of God was rarely heard or seen.” What’s certain is that the reason the revelation of God is rarely heard isn’t because God stops revealing himself, but because people aren’t aware of what they don’t know about God.

I want to finalise today’s reflection by quoting Socrates’ saying once again, “The only true wisdom is in knowing that you know nothing.” Let us ask, seek, and knock continually for further knowledge of God. Amen.