

When our boys were young they were absolutely convinced that their mother had eyes in the back of her head. She seemed to know when they were about to get into trouble or caught them just as they began doing something they should not be doing. Mother's instinct? Maybe, but she knew, "I know what you two boys are up to!"

As I read again the letters to the seven congregations in Revelation I noticed one phrase that appears again and again in all the letters: "I know..." For me it was an echo of the 139<sup>th</sup> Psalm where the Psalmist acknowledges that God had searched and God knows all that was happening in the life of the writer. Now, it depends on which translations you use—some suggest the Psalmist requested the search and others that God initiated it – whatever the reason the outcome is the same—our God knows.

The Psalmist is not lamenting the fact that God knows. The Psalmist is delighted that God has searched and God knows – or, maybe a better way of stating it is: Our God is active in creation. God has not gone away on vacation and left us to our own devices. Nor is God some great cosmic watchmaker who has created a great watch and left it to wind down. Our God is not a God who does not care about what is happening in the creation. Rather, our God is one who actively participates. The image portrayed by the Psalm is that our God knows our actions, our thoughts, the ups and downs of our lives. What we hide from others we cannot hide from God.

One of the things I glean from this is that God appreciates our honesty. God knows how we feel. God knows when we are angry, disappointed, etc. We may be able to hide our feelings from others but we can never hide them from God. When was the last time you were angry with God? Or at least the last time you told God you were angry? It doesn't seem right. It goes against the grain of what we have been taught. However, read again Job, many of the Psalms or the laments of some of the prophets—as they tell God how they feel. What the Psalmist is saying is that God knows. God has searched the very depths of our being and knows how we feel. God can handle those feelings – both the good and the bad and wants us to be honest in our prayers: Our God knows.

This is confirmed again in the letters to the congregations in Revelation. As the letter to Ephesus begins, "*I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance.*" The circumstances of the congregation in Ephesus are known to God. Not only that, God knows the city. God knows each Temple located there to the various gods and goddesses of the region. God knows the importance of the city to the region. God knows that it is not easy to be a Christian in such a city and knows the patience it takes to live there. God knows the founders of the congregation, Pricilla and Aquila. God knows how they conduct their life. They have stood firm for the Gospel through very difficult days. They have been faithful to their calling. They have stood and tested the various "theologies" that have come their way and have been found faithful. They have not believed every "apostle" who has come to them but has listened and tested the words. They have been faithful.

But... this faithfulness has taken its toil. They have lost their first love. Or, they have stopped loving. They are more concerned over doctrinal purity than love. Harsh words come from the Living Christ – you have failed to love in your search for purity. The indication is not that they should stop examining those who come to them but they need to add love back into the formula.

I was listening to the radio the other day and there was a discussion about the current Israeli/Palestine conflict. The host asked if there was not another way than military involvement. Immediately one of the guests responded, "NO, there is only one way. Bomb them into submission." It is a good thing I was driving slowly. I shouted, "There is another

way. The way of love.” What would happen if Israel practiced love? What if, instead of bombs and bullets, they began to rebuild the hospitals and schools? What if they began to restore families and provide food and proper living conditions? What if they did as God commanded them to do to the aliens and foreigners living in the land? What if they began to practice the faith they profess? Of course, it would have been better if they had done this years ago – but what if they started now? Yes, there will still be those in the world who will do stupid things – who will still try to stir up hate and destruction. But, if love had been the major component the rockets would be less, the people would be more willing to work to stop the “radicals” and their land would be a land where peace is a possibility. Bombs only bring more bombs and hatred – and yet we never learn. Not even those of us who name the name of Christ. We, too, may have lost our ability to love.

The problem with Ephesus was that they had lost their ability to love through the lens of Christ. The danger was that God will remove their candle from the candlestick. They must regain their ability to love. They need to discover again the joy they first had when they found God and discovered that God’s love extended to them.

As we come to this Table of our Lord we come with the understanding that our God knows us. It is both a wonderful and terrifying thought. It is wonderful because we know that we have been invited and have a place at the table. There is a place-card there with our name on it. We are welcome and expected.

As I was rummaging through my desk I found this place-card. Now I usually don’t save such things. But this one was special—they even spelled my name right. It was on the dining table in the Presidential dining room in the Congressional building in South Korea. There were six of us meeting with the then Secretary of State for South Korea. We were having a private luncheon and the place-card acknowledged that I had a place at the table. It was what allowed me and the others into the room. We were expected, a place had been prepared for us.

We have a place at this Table. We have a place not because of what we have done but because of the love that God has for us – the love demonstrated through Christ. It is a privilege to come to this table – one that we should not take for granted – the Ephesus congregation was warned – there is a chance your name will be removed – recover your first love.

But it is also terrifying when we think about it. God knows not only our public self but also our private self. God not only knows the outside but also the inside. God knows our crimes and misdemeanors—our sins are known to God. Yet, we are loved. This is the joy of the Table – our God knows and our God loves us. We are welcome at this table. Our invitation has not been removed and our place-card is still there. God knows and God still loves us. Christ was willing to stand in our place, take our guilt and make us worthy to come.

Peter was at the Table on that night. A few hours later he would deny but his name was not removed, he rediscovered the love. John was at the table. Judas was at the table – he made the decision to leave it. Because our God has searched and known us, Christ came – our hearts have been searched and we are welcome.

Coming to this Table means we still struggle with life. Coming to this Table does not mean that we have in any way reached perfection. Coming to this Table does mean that we daily seek to reclaim the love we first had and to share that love as Christ shared it. Our God knows – Our God loves.