

Baptism. Through our baptism we are adopted into the family of God. Through our baptism we are made ministers in the Church of God, called to proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ.

That, in a nutshell, was last week's sermon. It was an attempt to remind you of your responsibilities as a baptized Christian. It was an attempt to remind you that baptism, your baptism, was not an end, a one-time liturgical event, but that it was a beginning. It was an attempt to remind you that at your baptism, as at the baptism of Jesus, God said, "With you I am well-pleased."

One of my commentaries points out that that phrase, "With you I am well-pleased," was written in the past tense in the original Greek. He writes that Jewish tradition proposed that the name of the Messiah existed before creation; that God knew the Messiah and his mission from the beginning. This ties in with John when he says, "In the beginning was the Word . . ." God the Father knew and named the Son before creation. God the Father had preplanned the Messiah's mission. And just as Jesus was consecrated and empowered for his mission and ministry through his baptism, we are also consecrated and empowered for our mission as ministers of God's church through our baptism. It stands to reason that if God knew the Messiah and his mission from before he was born, so, too, does God know us.

And three of our four Scripture passages today touch on this idea of God knowing.

Today we get the story of Samuel as a young boy and God coming to him to do a new thing with the priesthood in Israel. The beginning of the story of Samuel goes something like this: Eli was a priest of the Temple when barren Hannah showed up praying for a son. In short, Eli says her prayers have been answered, she sings a song similar to the Magnificat, her son, Samuel, is presented to Eli, and Samuel eventually replaces Eli as a prophet of the Lord. From the beginning Samuel was to have a special ministry to God, replacing the old ways that had been corrupted under Eli and helping to lead Israel into a new way of being.

Today's Psalm selection is all about how intimately God knows us. You trace my journeys and are acquainted with all my ways. There is not a word on my lips, but you know it altogether. My body was not hidden from you while I was being made in secret and woven in the depths of the earth. The only thing the psalmist misses here is something like, "Because I come from you, O Lord; with me are you well-pleased."

In both these passages, and especially in the Psalm, we are reminded that from before time God knows us. We are reminded that through time, God knows us. And we are reminded that after time, God knows us.

The gospel passage for today picks up on this aspect of God knowing us intimately with the conversation between Nathanael and Jesus. Philip finds Nathanael and says that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah. With some doubt and a whole lot of skepticism, Nathanael meets Jesus. In the course of that conversation Jesus makes it clear that he already knows Nathanael.

And here things get interesting. Jesus talks about knowing Nathanael while under the fig tree. Nathanael makes the first public acknowledgement of Jesus as Son of God, King of Israel. Jesus goes on to tell him about seeing greater things than simply identifying him while under a fig tree.

Nathanael was apparently well-versed in Scripture, that's how he knows about the reputation of Nazareth. Because of that, he had a preconceived notion about who Jesus should be. Those preconceptions stood in the way of him being able to truly experiencing Jesus on a personal level. Just as Jonah sat under the bush waiting for God to live up to his own preconceptions, so too did Nathanael sit under a fig tree waiting for a preconceived Messiah to appear. This very well may have been the reason that Nathanael did not become a disciple.

God knew Samuel before he was born and used him to reform the priesthood of Israel. The psalmist wrote that God knew him while yet unformed. Jesus knew Nathanael while sitting under the shadow of preconceived notions about the Messiah. And God knows each and every one of us, and our ministry, just as intimately. On the one hand, this can seem kind of creepy. But there's a difference between stalking a person to find out if they have been bad or good and trying to bribe them into good behavior, versus that of knowing a person on such a level of intimacy that we say, "With you I am well pleased."

This level of intimacy runs both ways. Obviously God knows us intimately. But how intimately do we know God? How much time do we spend getting to know him? How much time in study and prayer and listening and learning do we spend? Do we know enough about God to say, "You are well pleasing in my sight?"

Which brings me back to baptism. In baptism we are adopted into the household of God. At our baptism, we are consecrated and empowered as ministers of the Church. At our baptism, God lets us know that he is well-pleased with us because he knows us. Are we willing to live into the ministry that God calls us to? Are we willing to live into our calling, like Samuel, and do great things for God? Or are we more like Nathanael, sitting under a fig tree and waiting for God to live up to our expectations?

From before time God knows us. Through time, God knows us. After time, God knows us. We are knit together, marvelously made, and with us God is well-pleased.

May we recognize that God knows us intimately. May we strive to know God just as intimately as he knows us. And may we live into the ministry to which God called us before we were born that began with our baptism.

Amen.