

2021-01-17 Known and Called

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January 17, 2021

Pastor Scott Austin

artisanchurch.com

[Music Intro]

[Male voice] The following is a presentation of Artisan Church in Rochester, New York.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

Thank you, Doug, for that reading. And thanks to all of you who have played a part in today's service. That includes those of you who are "just watching" or listening. Each of you who is part of the service and joined in any way is part of our community and we're grateful for your participation. You make us you make us better.

So, I have a good old fashioned 3-point sermon for you today. I don't always do it this way, but today it worked out. I have a good old fashioned 3-point sermon and each of the points is based on one of the 3 lectionary passages that you've heard read in today's service. And once again I'll remind you that you can, and maybe should, do your best to read ahead. I encourage it. You can find the readings that we'll be using each week online. Just search for the word "lectionary" in any search engine and it should turn up a result that gives you all of the texts that we're going to be looking at for the coming week. And if you read those during the week I'm sure you'll have a deeper experience on Sundays.

But before I get to my 3-point sermon I have an opening question for you. I would love to hear what's going on in your world. So my question is this, and you can put your answers in the Zoom chat and I'll read out some of them. What is the thing that's taking all of your attention right now? All your extra attention? Maybe it's a work project that you've got going, maybe it's something to do with family, maybe it's a side hustle. Maybe it's debilitating worry about politics or global health concerns, maybe it's a hobby. Whatever it is, go ahead and put it in the Zoom chat and I'll show you a picture of what I'm working on right now.

[Shares screen and shows photo] This is a guitar that I'm building from a kit, and if you recognize the room that's the Artisan Church sanctuary which is not in use right now, obviously. So it's a convenient place to apply stain to wood in a big empty spacious room. So that's what I'm working on, and when I'm not busy doing other stuff that's kind of what my brain is

2021-01-17 Known and Called

pumping on. So, what's going on with you? Scott says, "Trying to buy a new desk chair #6problems," which I think is an Enneagram reference that I do not understand. Michael says, "Feeling God's love." What a wonderful thing to be preoccupied with. Avila says, "Home office renovations." I see a theme over in the Cranfield house. Beth says, "Moving and settling into a new home/community." Welcome back to Rochester, Beth, it's nice to have you here. Penny, or at least Penny's phone says, "Applying for an NEA grant." Good luck, Penny, we hope you get that grant. Clara says, "I'm making an Among Us board game." Whoa! I know there are some Artisans and people who will be very eager to play that board game when it's ready, so you have to make sure you let us know. Eileen says, "Praying for peace on Inauguration Day." Amen to that. Sandy says, "Sorting, discarding and organizing." Yeah, make the best of this time when maybe there's less to do. [Laughs] "Doom scrolling." Yes, please don't become too preoccupied with doom scrolling, he said to himself pretending to admonish someone else. Well, there's lots of things going on in the world and I'm glad to hear some of the things that are going on in your mind.

So here's my 3-point sermon. The first point comes from Psalm 139, and Pastor Jessie used that beautiful illustration and so beautifully told the story and expressed the meaning of this, which is that God knows you intimately. Psalm 139 says, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made." And God knows you because God made you, and that's true whether or not you know God. Psalm 139 is an interesting part of the Bible. If you're sort of a church insider you may know that this Psalm has become somewhat politicized, which I think is a shame because it sometimes can cause us to miss the deep beauty of these words. Which is to say that this is not a psalm about prenatal biology but about the intimate knowledge and love of the God who made you and who made me, and who made each one of us human beings. Now I don't know all of you in the service today. I don't know who may be watching this with their camera off or listening to this on the podcast later. I don't know whether you are religious or not, but I don't think that matters because I believe God knows you and loves you. And all of the specific detail about, you know, being formed in the womb and counting the hairs on the head and all of the stuff that you find in the in these psalms, this one included, is a beautiful poetic way of expressing that central truth which is point number one — that God knows you and loves you.

And here's the next interesting thing [laughs] and this is where it might get a little scary because the second point is that God may call you even before you know who God is. That's what we learn from the story in 1 Samuel. Samuel was the boy in the story but his name is also on the book, so you know right from the beginning that there are some big things in store for Samuel. And it says in Samuel chapter 3, "The word of the Lord was rare in those days," which is a really interesting thing to think about; the idea that God might speak less in some times than

2021-01-17 Known and Called

God speaks in other times. I mean, that would be consistent with the narrative that's laid out in the Bible where there are long periods of time where we get no books because nothing notable happens, right? Of course, all kinds of notable things happen but it doesn't rise to the level of important for the whole community of God's people to remember forever. I wonder how different it would have felt to live in one time, one type of time, versus another. At any rate, God does speak to Samuel, which is really remarkable if you think about it because it says in verse 7, "Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him." See, we might be tempted to think that God only speaks to those who are already very knowledgeable and experienced religious people. That God only speaks to people who already know God well. But that's just not true.

In this story, the person who was in charge, so to speak, of all the religious stuff (that would be Eli), he didn't hear God at all. All Eli did in this story, not to minimize it, but all he did was help Samuel, the young inexperienced person, recognize the voice of God when he heard it and then teach him how to respond when the voice of God spoke. Which by the way, is why I don't want to take too much away from Eli, who you know was not exactly an admirable figure. But that's, by the way, what I consider my main job as a pastor to be. So even though it's sometimes my job to hear from God and speak those words to you, I think it's much more my job, certainly many more days of my work, to help you hear the voice of God and recognize it and to guide you in how to respond when that happens. That's what Eli did, that's what I like to think I do as a pastor. And so I'm really glad that we get this reading today because it gives me a chance to say that even though you may not know God, you might not be a religious person, you may not have confessed any faith, you may not even know why you're here in this Zoom call today. God knows you, and God may be speaking to you even now because there is no prior experience or expertise required for God to speak to you.

So there's kind of a similar thing that happens in the Gospel reading today. I don't know if you noticed this when you heard Doug read it a minute ago, but that will bring me to my third point. Remember, I promised a three-point sermon and the first two points are; God knows you because God made you, and God sometimes calls people who don't yet know God. So for point three, just a little heads up. I'm going to give you a little runway here, but I want to let you know that we are going to have to get just slightly nerdy with the original language of the Scriptures here — just ever so slightly nerdy. Don't worry, it won't be hard or too much, but we are going to get there in just a minute. But what happens in this story in John's gospel is not terribly unlike what happens in 1 Samuel, right? Because when Jesus calls Philip, Philip tells Nathaniel. But Nathaniel doesn't know Jesus so Nathaniel is very skeptical. In fact, when he hears that Jesus comes from Nazareth he says, "What good can come from Nazareth?" Like

2021-01-17 Known and Called

Jesus is from Henrietta or something, you know. [Laughs] Sorry, the last time I preached on this passage I said Greece so I had to even it out this time. Anyway, Nathaniel is skeptical. But here's the thing — Nathaniel didn't know Jesus, but Jesus already knew Nathaniel. Jesus says, "I saw you under the fig tree." So Nathaniel believes in Jesus as a result of this being known by Jesus, and he immediately commits to following him which, by the way, I think is the right response when Jesus shows you that he knows you before you knew him. The correct response is probably to adjust your life and align it into following him.

But there's a really interesting thing that happens with the pronouns in this reading from John chapter one, and this is going to bring me into my third point right here. We know that pronouns are very important. Some of us very recently become aware of the importance of pronouns and how much they can be part of how someone understands their own identity and how they can be a part of the way we recognize that identity. I see a handful of people in our Zoom meeting have added their pronouns to their names and that's a great way to show support. But we also know that English has some limitations around singular and plural pronouns, right? And it's not just the singular "they." This is particularly true today about the pronoun "you."

Now grammar nerds know that the word "you" is the second person pronoun and in English it's the same word whether it's singular or plural. So if I'm talking to one friend then I say, "Can you pass me the sugar?" that's a singular. And if I'm talking to the whole church and I say, "I'm glad to see you today," that's plural. It's the same word either way, and this is actually something we lost as our language evolved because in older English, Elizabethan English or King James Bible English if you happen to have one of those lying around, you see the word "ye." And much where before it was ever referring to a rapper it was the plural of "you," right? So if you happen to be reading the King James version of the Bible and you come across the word "ye," it's not just a fancy way of saying "you." It's a pluralized way of saying "you." Now for those of you who are still awake, you may be thinking that this is an entirely non-essential fact, but I need you to know that our religion has been distorted from a communal experience with God and into a navel gazing, individually wrapped commodity and the pronouns don't help. In other words, there's a lot more plural use in the New Testament than you probably are aware.

So, in the Gospel of John chapter one when Nathaniel confesses his belief to Jesus he says, Ok, if you saw me under the fig tree I'm going to follow you. Jesus answers him in verse 50, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree you will see greater things than these?" And that "you" is singular, saying you (Nathaniel) will see greater things than these. But in verse 51 the pronoun switches to plural. We don't see this in modern English translations but

2021-01-17 Known and Called

it's true, and when Jesus says to him going on in his discourse, "Very truly I tell you, you will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the son of man," both of the uses in verse 51 are plural. And so at long last, here's my third point: When God knows you and God calls you, even if you don't know God yet, if you answer and open yourself to God and become a disciple of Jesus, this immediately places you into the company of his other followers. In other words, you become part of the plural. When God says "you," it's not usually any one of us individually. It's all of us.

In a time when we feel so isolated, so alone, it is such a comfort and a joy and, hopefully, a draw to God to know that in following God we become "ye," we become the plural "you." We become part of the gathered Fellowship of the community of the saints. We are going to celebrate communion in a minute and this is part of what makes communion so wonderful and beautiful, and the way that I talk about it almost every time I try to emphasize this community. And so, I want you to think back to the thing that you shared earlier about what is preoccupying your mind right now. Maybe it's a good thing, maybe it's a not so good thing, maybe it's a totally neutral thing, but I wonder if whatever it is might be inhibiting you from recognizing the voice of God. Because most of us are not going to hear an audible voice anyway.

I wonder how much time you have spent trying to quiet your mind and open your mind, and listen for God. You might need that reminder whether you're very religious or not at all religious. I need that reminder just about every day, because God knows you and God loves you and God might be ready to call you. I hope that in this moment I've been Eli to your Samuel and pointed you toward what you might now be realizing is the voice of God, and encouraging you to respond, "Here I am." And if you will do that, you will experience I believe, just what Nathaniel experienced, which is that he went from being a singular to being part of the plural. May it be true for you and for me, and not to put too fine a point on it, but for all of us. Amen.

[End of sermon]

[Male voice] For more information, visit us at [ArtisanChurch.com](https://www.ArtisanChurch.com).