

Good morning and welcome to everyone watching on live-stream or on video. It's going to take some getting used to this new experience of church; you'll have to get used to participating from home, and I'll have to get used to preaching to a camera.

Yesterday I had one congregant mention that they were looking forward to attending church in their pyjamas today. In fact, this same congregant mentioned that they would pay me \$5 if I preached while wearing a shirt, a tie, and pyjama pants. Seriously? Only \$5? You know who you are...you're going to have to up your game.

A little fun never hurt anyone, in fact, these days it's important that we make room for joy. I know many of you are concerned about Covid19, and we have reason for concern, but, as we continue to look to Jesus, and find new ways to remain connected to one another, we also have reasons for joy.

Even though I can't see you this morning, my heart is filled with love for you, and as I do every Sunday, I'm praying with you and for you. Now for the sermon.

Denial is a powerful thing and we're all prone to it. We are tempted to refuse the reality right in front of us when it's distasteful or abhorrent. We push away what we know to be true because sometimes the truth is too hard or too painful to admit to anyone, including ourselves. And so we plug our ears, or cover our eyes, hoping to escape what is inescapable.

The weekend warrior stubbornly—foolishly—pushes themselves beyond their limits, unwilling to admit that they no longer have their 25 year old body. We have a whole range of beauty products for

those unwilling to admit they are old enough to have wrinkles. We've actually got a whole range of elective surgeries to mask the appearance of aging. A little nip, tuck, or injection will solve the problem; *maybe no one will notice?*

Addiction is fuelled by denial. *This isn't controlling me; I say what, when, and how.* In truth, we are only fooling ourselves.

In May of 2006, I was pastoring at a church in Calgary and I was scheduled to go on a ministry trip—Cairo, Qatar, Dubai—but I was hesitant about going. My mom had been battling cancer for nearly 18 months and her time appeared to be drawing short; I was hesitant about being so far away. When I shared my concerns with my Mom, she encouraged me to go, and go I did, but when I returned to Calgary, my brother urged me to fly to Vancouver as soon as possible.

Over the next week, I shuttled my mom back and forth between home and hospitable; because of her leukemia, she needed regular blood transfusions. As we drove, we talked about all kinds of things, including her diminishing health. My mom knew she was dying, I knew she was dying, and we didn't shy away from the conversation. In fact, my mom had been talking with me about dying for some time, in part, because my Dad couldn't bring himself to talk with her about it.

On one of the hospitable days, my mom laid down on a bed; she was weary, and her transfusion was going to take a few hours. I decided to visit my Dad's shop, since it was just a few kilometres away. When I arrived, I made my way onto the shop floor and found Dad; he was at his lathe, working away. He wanted to know how Mom

was doing and I told him that she was resting while the transfusion was taking place.

He asked me another question, then another; he loved my Mom and he didn't want to let her go—it was written all over his face. At one point, I took a deep breath and asked him the one question he didn't want to hear: “Dad, you know that Mom is dying, don't you? Mom wants to share this last part of her journey with you but she can't because you're living in denial about what's happening to her.”

I said it gently, lovingly...it's the hardest thing I've ever said to my Dad. He broke down, threw his arms around me, and he wept. We both wept. In the middle of a machine shop.

My Mom only lived for another 3 weeks, but Mom and Dad walked the journey together.

We do not progress very far in life when we choose live in denial, or, when we live with a false image of ourselves. And so we return to a theme that I addressed a few weeks ago, namely, the importance of self-knowledge.

This morning we continue in our series through the Gospel of John, focusing in on the events leading to the death and resurrection of Jesus. At this time I'd like to invite you to turn in your Bible with me to John 18:12-27.

12 Then the detachment of soldiers with its commander and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus. They bound him 13 and brought him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest

that year. 14 Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jewish leaders that it would be good if one man died for the people.

15 Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard, 16 but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the servant girl on duty there and brought Peter in. 17 'You aren't one of this man's disciples too, are you?' she asked Peter. He replied, 'I am not.' 18 It was cold, and the servants and officials stood around a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself.

19 Meanwhile, the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. 20 'I have spoken openly to the world,' Jesus replied. 'I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. 21 Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said.' 22 When Jesus said this, one of the officials nearby slapped him in the face. 'Is this the way you answer the high priest?' he demanded. 23 'If I said something wrong,' Jesus replied, 'testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?' 24 Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

25 Meanwhile, Simon Peter was still standing there warming himself. So they asked him, 'You aren't one of his disciples too, are you?' He denied it, saying, 'I am not.' 26 One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, 'Didn't I see you with him in the garden?' 27 Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow.

The action in our text surrounds two primary people, Jesus and Peter. John writes in such a way that we see what happened *to* Jesus, but we also see what's happening *in* Peter. We're not told what Peter was thinking or feeling, but his words and actions are enough—our imagination naturally fills in the gaps. Earlier in the evening, Jesus had prophesied Peter's denial; this was the moment it unfolded.

I'm going to begin by looking at Jesus on trial and in the second half of the sermon, we'll look more closely at Peter's denial and the importance of self-knowledge.

In one sense, Jesus' pre-trial provides the context for a complex character comparison. By intermingling the examination of Jesus with the three denials of Peter, we are meant to see Jesus as resolute and unwavering, even as Peter is revealed to be unsteady and fearful. The contrast is stark.

But before we get to the pre-trial itself, allow me to clarify the nature of the relationship between Annas and Caiaphas. We're told in vs. 13 that Annas was father-in-law to Caiaphas; Caiaphas was the high priest. So far, everything is quite clear; the confusion comes later, in vs 22. Here, the answer Jesus offered to Annas' question was deemed to be disrespectful and one of the officials struck Jesus in the face, saying, "*Is this the way you answer the high priest?*"

Why would the official refer to Annas as the high priest when John has already indicated that Caiaphas, his son-in-law, was high priest?

We know from Old Testament law that the high priest was chosen by God, and, the appointment was for life. We know from history that once Israel became a vassal state, Rome disbanded a permanent high priesthood; it left too much power, for too long, in one in person. This is how rebellions start. By limiting the high priest to a limited term in office, they limited their power and influence.

But it seems that Annas found a way to manoeuvre within Rome's system of control. Not only did he serve a term as high priest, but so did 5 of his sons, and eventually his son-in-law Caiaphas. It's more than likely that regardless of which son sat in the high priest's chair, Annas was the one pulling the strings and making the decisions.¹

In 14, in a cryptic way, John lets us know that the decision to put Jesus to death was made long before His trial ever began. The reference in vs. 14 points back to a prior meeting of the high priest and the Jewish ruling council; this meeting is outlined in John 11:45-53. You'll remember that a man by the name of Lazarus died, and 4 days later Jesus raised him from the dead. This miracle caused great concern among the Jewish leaders. As Jesus' influence grew, the leaders feared that a Jewish rebellion would break out, with a miracle-producing-Messiah leading the way.

The leaders wrestled with what to do about Jesus, saying, "*Here is this man performing many signs. 48 If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation.*" Caiaphas spoke up saying, "*50 You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is*

¹ Leon Morris, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel According To John*, 663-664.

better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.”

John writes, “**51** [Caiaphas] *did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, 52 and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one. 53 So from that day on they plotted to take his life.*”

Now, of course, Caiaphas spoke more than he knew. He didn’t know that Jesus really was heaven-sent, or, that He was the Saviour of the world. Caiaphas was looking to protect the interests of the Temple, and perhaps his own interests, and Jesus was the unfortunate bloke who would take the fall.

It had already been decided. Jesus would have to die. The conversation between Annas and Jesus was a farce. Annas knew it, Jesus knew it, and this shared understanding helps us to make sense of what Jesus said.

On first reading, it appears that Annas is quite sincere in his line of questioning, wanting to know about Jesus’ teaching and His disciples. Jesus, however, sees right through him; let’s take a look at His response in vs. 20.

“I have spoken openly...I always taught in synagogues or at the temple...I said nothing in secret. 21 Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said.” Again, on first reading, Jesus’ response seems uncooperative, even antagonistic. In truth, Jesus is questioning how He is being questioned.

In Jewish legal proceedings, a defendant was not required to prove his or her innocence, the accuser was required to prove the defendant’s guilt—they did this by calling witnesses. Jesus had been arrested, but no charge had been laid, and no witnesses had been called. If it was witnesses that Annas wanted, surely they could be found, Jesus pointed out that His teaching was always done in public places.

There will be no justice done, not here. The proceedings had been set in motion, the verdict had been decided—Jesus was going to die. And so, still bound, He was sent off to Caiaphas.

At this time, let’s shift our focus to Peter. Vs. 15-18 describe the first denial, while vs. 25-27 contain #2 and #3.

I would encourage all of us to think of Peter charitably; he was under tremendous pressure. In fact, Peter was one of two disciples who were brave enough to go into this lion’s den; the people who had arrested Jesus were just in the other room. No doubt Peter feared for Jesus’ life and his own. Would you have displayed more courage than Peter? I’m not sure I would have.

The first denial was made easy by the way the question was framed: “*You aren’t one of this man’s disciples too, are you?*” How easy it was to simply agree—“*I am not.*” A few minutes later, the question was asked a second time, and then a third.

In the moment of decision, Peter did the one thing he swore he would never do—he denied even knowing Jesus. In one respect, we are all Peter; our capacity for ignorance, self-deception—or self-preservation—is greater than we know.

illus: A few years ago my family joined my younger brother's family and we went camping together in Birch Bay. On one of the afternoons, the kids were busy riding their bikes and that gave the adults some time to talk; my sister-in-law began to tell us about a disturbing trend she saw happening in her friendship group.

Marriages were splitting up, with some of her girlfriends leaving their husbands and children in search of adventure. One wife left her husband for different husband within the broader friendship circle. Another wife left, without ever saying why—her husband and kids were shattered. When she was asked why she was leaving a marriage of 15+ years, she wasn't able to give an answer—she just wanted out, she wanted something new, someone different.

I share this story to make a particular point: sometimes people behave in ways they could never have imagined 2 years earlier. Sometimes people say things that destroy others, or they make decisions that have devastating consequences, but when pressed to explain why, they can do no more than shrug their shoulders—their behaviour is a mystery to themselves.

We may feel an anger under the surface of our lives, but have no idea why it's present or where it comes from. We may feel fearful in our decision making, or in our relationships, but when pressed we may be unable to articulate why.

David Benner writes, “[Christians] have focussed on knowing God and tended to ignore knowing [themselves]. The consequences have been grievous—marriages betrayed, families destroyed, ministries

shipwrecked and endless numbers of people damaged...Focussing on God while failing to know ourselves deeply may produce an external form of piety, but it will always leave a gap between appearance and reality.”²

What Peter needed, what we need, is a double knowledge—a knowledge of God and a knowledge of self. In his autobiography, St. Augustine once prayed, “Grant, Lord, that I may know myself that I might know You.” John Calvin wrote, “Nearly the whole of sacred doctrine consists in these two parts: knowledge of God and of ourselves.”

Many of us are strangers to our own hearts; we think, we feel, but we live an unexamined life. We get stuck in patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving but we don't know why we think, feel, or behave as we do.

Ironically, to be “all about Jesus” requires a careful attention to oneself—the self that God loves and invites into relationship. Our whole life—our thoughts, emotions, actions, and relationships—is the arena in which God makes Himself known.

And so, coming to know myself as a sinner, opens me to knowing something more about God—that He is forgiving, merciful, and loving. In the same way, coming to know God's love, opens me to knowing something more about myself—that I am valuable and precious to God. Knowledge of God and knowledge of self are intertwined and both are required to become mature, whole, people.

² David G. Benner, *The Gift Of Being Myself*, 20-21.

Peter's three year apprenticeship to Jesus became a master class in knowing God and beginning to know himself. At times Peter was brimming with confidence—he was cocky, sure of himself, speaking without thinking things through.

Mark 14 captures Peter's misplaced confidence. At the Last Supper Jesus prophesied that on that very night, the disciples would all fall away from Him. But Peter emphatically protested, *These other disciples may abandon you Jesus, but not me. My love and loyalty are rock-solid. Even if I have to die with you today, I will not disown you.*" Peter set himself above his friends—he saw himself as a man of unwavering courage. But we now know that Peter overestimated his courage and underestimated his fear.

I wonder, what have you overestimated in your life? And, what have I underestimated in mine? Like Peter, we all have a shadow side to our life. Our shadow is plain to God, and often to the people around us, while it remains largely hidden from our sight. At times we catch glimpses of our shadow, often, when we are surprised by our own strong emotions.

If you find yourself overreacting to something that was said, or done, your shadow is likely front and centre—the fearful, angry, bitter, compulsive part of you that tends to remain hidden. But what's inside always comes out, and it is for our good when it does. In the light of Jesus' presence, Peter became aware of his shadow, and ultimately it

³ Paraphrase of John 16:13.

⁴ Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *How People Grow*, 102.

⁵ Cloud and Townsend, 108.

became the place of his transformation. God doesn't expose us our shadow in order to shame us; He has in mind to heal us, to change us, to make us whole. *Don't you want to be whole?*

Application: The path towards self-knowledge is not a solitary one. Self-knowledge requires deep relationship with God and one another. As I draw my sermon to a close, allow me to offer two suggestions by way of application.

First, if you want to grow in self-knowledge, cultivate relationship with the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, *when the Holy Spirit comes, He will guide you into all the truth, for He is the Spirit of truth.*³ We cannot become whole without a true picture of who we really are, and where we are really at. The goal is not to train ourselves to see better, or to know more—the goal is to cultivate a dependency on the Holy Spirit, and to keep in step with what He reveals.

The Christian life is a Spirit-filled-life, supernatural, life—we draw upon a strength that surpasses our own. But this doesn't mean that we are passive in any way. We are called to listen, to confess, repent, and obey—we partner with the Spirit in all of these ways.⁴

What I am about to say is basic but absolutely essential. When the Holy Spirit exposes something in us, we need to take steps to deal with it—this is what it means to “keep in step with the Spirit.”⁵

There is no sense in asking God for further direction when we aren't following the direction He's already given.

In Psalm 139, King David prayed, "*Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*" I'd encourage you to offer this prayer to the Spirit, and then be silent—allow Him to make you aware of what you cannot see.

Here's the **Second** suggestion: **if you want to grow in self-knowledge, cultivate spiritual friendships with others**—*we cannot become all that God intends on our own.*

The Blind Self is the part of you that you cannot see, but others can. You might think of yourself as being patient, but others see your impatience. You might think of yourself as a team player while others see you as unbending and demanding. All of us are blind to our own blind spots. Growing spiritually, emotionally, and relationally is not an individual exercise.

You will not grow if you wall yourself off from others. We grow in self-knowledge as God uses the people in our lives to bless and to expose, to love and to challenge. Many people feel who feel disconnected from God are actually feeling the loss of a meaningful connection with His people.

It takes humility to recognize that we need others in order to grow. John Calvin once said, "*If God is our Father, then the Church is our Mother;*" our faith/maturity/wholeness in Jesus is nurtured in the company of others.

Pray

Worship

Benediction:

Before I offer a final word of blessing, I want to highlight one of the information items from our recent email communication. If you are 70+ and are unable to get out of your house to get groceries or other essentials, please let us know; we have a team in place who can pick up and deliver items to you. You can call the church office at 604-984-6422 or email us at info@nsac.bc.ca.

And now for the blessing, taken from 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17, "*May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.*" Amen, and amen!