

You Are Well-Known, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. E4070128
Jeremiah 1:4-10 and 1 Corinthians 13
Elon Community Church, United Church of Christ, 28 January, 2007

There have been times during my life when I wished to remain anonymous. For instance, there was an incident during college when I joined with some others to pull off a typical college-like prank. At the height of the excitement I was recognized, even though I was wearing a ski mask that covered all but my eyes. How humiliating it was to have hours of careful planning and preparation go down the tubes when a student pointed to me and shouted out in delight, “Dan Kuhn!”

It was just a matter of hours before the dean of men knocked at my door and asked me what I had been doing at 1:00 that morning. I was ashamed. I had been caught because I was well-known when I didn’t want to be. I paid for my deed by doing forty hours of campus cleanup.

Anonymity allows us to do things we would not normally do if people knew who we were, where we lived, where we worked and who our family was. On the other hand, we are more inclined to take chances, and break cultural norms when we are anonymous. I drive kindlier if I think, “That’s a church member in front of me,” or: “That’s a police officer coming up behind.”

It is good that we are well-known. Being well-known knits a community together more tightly. “That’s Sarah. She’s been struggling to get a job. She needs help.”

“That’s Tony. He needs a little bit more self-control.” If everyone knew that at all times they were well-known, perhaps there would be less crime and more care.

There are times in our lives when we feel as though we’re all alone and we don’t want to be, such as at the time of the big party when all our friends are talking about whom they’re going with, and we don’t have a date; the time when I feel I’m the only one in the whole world facing this illness; or the time when I seem to be the only one standing up for a moral principle. “Am I the only one in the office refusing to bet on the superbowl?” This is the time of profound loneliness.

Jeremiah, the prophet of the Seventh Century BCE knew profound loneliness. Jeremiah saw the behavior of the citizens of his country and knew that they were doing wrong. They practiced idolatry, worshiping objects rather than God almighty. “As a thief is shamed when caught so the house of Israel shall be shamed— they, their kings, their officials, their priests, and their prophets, who say to a tree, ‘You are my father,’ and to a stone, ‘You gave me birth.’”¹

This did not gain Jeremiah popularity with priests, kings, or other prophets. As a result of his prophetic words, Jeremiah at one time was thrown into prison. At another, Pashhur, the priest of the temple, hit Jeremiah and put him into stocks. I don’t mean stocks of the stock market, but stocks that lock head and arms in public market place.

There were times Jeremiah felt like throwing in the towel and giving up, because he was so lonely. In his loneliness, he felt he was the only one speaking out against such idolatry. He even became upset with God because it was his deep commitment to God in the first place that caused his isolation from others.

But, Jeremiah kept going on, because he realized he had been known by God since before his birth. He knew he wasn’t alone. He knew who he was and what he was called to be. He knew his purpose in life. He heard God saying to him, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and

¹Jeremiah 2:26-27

before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.’²

We also are well-known. The God who created us and gave us life, knows us. God knew our parents and knew us when we were just a few cells uniting and forming into an embryo. God has given us a role to play in life. We may not know that role yet, but that is not God’s fault. It means we need to pay closer attention to our prayer life, and closer attention to God. What is God calling me to be and to do?

There are drawbacks to being well-known. People know our backgrounds. I had a chance to become pastor of my home church. I refused to apply because I was well-known. My Sunday school teachers were there who knew what I was like in seventh grade. I could never have been fully accepted as pastor and prophet to these dear people who still called me “Danny!” I have related stories about how people in my home community knew who I was and what I did, and word got back to my parents. I couldn’t get away with anything, but it was a community of love: church, city, home. I was well-known, and I was well-loved. Part of that love was to not let me get away with acts or words which might be harmful to others.

Because we are loved and we are well-known by God, we have a confidence. We are part of God’s family, and we will always be welcome. But, as part of this family of God our minds will be stretched.

Another reading for this Sunday is Luke 4:21-30 where the people of Nazareth, Jesus’ home town, became angry with him. When he announced that God’s grace, God’s message of good news, was meant for all people and not simply Jews, they became angry and wanted to throw him off a cliff!

Jesus asserts that God’s good news is for all people. It is for you. God loves you. That kind of love “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” – and, it [love] never ends!³

Faith is a great and wonderful thing. In a time when we feel all alone, and things look dark, we can remember that we have faith.

Our faith gives us hope. It is a hope that promises that as soon as the sun sets, we know that the dawn of a new day is also coming.

Faith and hope are wonderful, but amid the faith and hope, there is love. In the darkness, in the loneliness, we know we are loved. We can endure. God promises us that. Not only can we endure, but we can love! In our loneliness and darkness, we can still love others.

“Faith, hope, and love abide, these three, and the greatest of these is love.”⁴

²Jeremiah 1:5

³1 Corinthians 13:7-8

⁴1 Corinthians 13:13