

[BLANK] Well, here we are, marching into Fall. I took a look at the church calendar this week, and noticed that we are now six months past this year's Easter celebration. From this week forward, we'll be getting closer to Easter next year! And, of course, Christmas is not all that far off, either. Time is marching on. [DIPLOMA] It seems like a long time ago to me already that I finished seminary, in May. This is my first fall in four years without having to go to classes! That's kind of cool, but the funny part is that after all of that schooling, I don't really feel like I really learned all that much. [BLANK]

Don't get me wrong, I appreciate my education, and I am very grateful for it. But at the end of the day, I only scratched the surface of what there is to learn. More importantly, school can't teach you faith. We need to know about the Bible, know about church history, know about how to lead our churches - there are practical things that we need to get under our belt. But the limits of human knowledge are always with us, and those limits teach me one important thing: God knows a lot more than we do. And that's good, because we could all stand to think more like God. Would you pray with me, please. [PRAYER]

[DATA] Before I went to school to become a Pastor, I worked in what some people call the information industry. I helped companies to market and sell information products and services. I was there when the Internet first started to take off, and I saw it grow from a simple toy, for students and computer fans, into the greatest source of information that humanity has ever had. Thanks to the Internet, in just the last two years, the total amount of information that humans have created in all of human history has doubled. Two years. It seems that we know a lot, now, doesn't it?

Except, of course, that we really don't know all that much. [STARS] Every time we point a new telescope up into the universe, we discover more and more things that we never knew about. Even though we can point to these things, now, we really don't know them. We just get a better count of things that we don't know. And most of these objects in the universe are so far away that what we are seeing is how these things were thousands, millions, or billions of years ago, because the light that lets us see them took so long to get to us. Do we know how they are, now? Not really. What do we know? Not much. [BLANK]

It's not that human knowledge doesn't matter. It's important to understand things as they are, and as they've been. But knowing these things should make us humble, not proud. Knowing things should make us realize that what we know with our minds can never replace what we need to know with our hearts. God wants us to know about God's creation. That's why we have eyes, ears, mouths, noses, muscles, and skin. God wants us to experience creation, to touch it, to smell it, to hear it, and to add our sounds, sights, smells, and touches to the story of creation. But it's also why we have hearts. God also wants us to feel creation in the core of our being, and to sense how it all affects each beat of our heart, each breath of our soul, and how it connects us with the hearts of other living beings.

[KNEELING] This is why humility is such an important Christian discipline.

Humility is at the core of how we learn to know what God knows, and to do things the way that God wants us to do things. Humility is recognizing that our limits were created by God, and are loved by God. Yet God knows that what we do matters. Every little thing that we do, really matters. Every action, every word, every comment, is a vital action, which can change lives, and affect God's world. Today's reading from the letter of James reminds us that even our little tongue can push out words that make great changes, like the small rudder on the back of a boat steering it one way or another. That's an awesome responsibility, isn't it? What we do really matters! Please help us, God, because, humbly, we must admit that our actions do have consequences!

[WINTER] My family knows about consequences. Ancestors from both my mother's family and my father's family endured the winter of 1777 at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, one of many Continental Army soldiers and officers who suffered a brutal winter of tents, bare clothing, and scarce supplies. Many got sick, and many died.

[CROSSING] Today at Valley Forge, you can see an enormous painting of George Washington, the leader of the Continental Army, crossing the Delaware River near Valley Forge, to a surprise attack on enemy troops in Trenton, New Jersey. It might be an inspiring, patriotic painting, but it's a complete fabrication. [PRAYING] The real story of Washington, and most people at Valley Forge, is a story of humility. They were at their limits, facing the consequences of defeat. God's knowledge wasn't theirs. Humbly, they prayed for God's guidance, in their minds and hearts.

[GROTTO] Two thousand years ago, Mark's gospel tells us, Jesus and his followers were at the limits of their travels from Galilee, at a spot near the city of Caesarea Phillipi. Like my ancestors at Valley Forge, the followers of Jesus were far, far away from home, perhaps the furthest that any of them had ever been from home. And like many people at Valley Forge, the followers of Jesus had begun to know that they were a part of a story that had far bigger consequences than what they had thought. Jesus seemed to have both the mind and the heart of God. Jesus had God's wisdom. Jesus had God's power to transform creation into something better through healing, and forgiveness. They had seen so much of God's power in Jesus. They had learned so much of who God is from Jesus.

And so, in this far-away spot, Jesus asked them: what do you know? Who do you say that I am? Most of the disciples seemed to fumble with answering Jesus. They knew that they were part of something big, but they were afraid to blurt out something stupid. Well, leave it to Peter, the disciple of Jesus who always seemed to have something to say, right or wrong, to blurt it out, and say, "Jesus, you are the Christ, the anointed One of God." Peter saw Jesus as the new leader of Israel, come to save them from oppression, and to be a Godly king for God's world.

[BLANK] You might say that Peter expected this to be the "Washington crossing the Delaware" moment for Jesus, when Jesus would kick butt for the sake of Israel, and help Israel to stand tall and proud again before God, and before the nations of the world. But as soon as Peter said this, Jesus asked his followers not to share with the world that he was the Christ, the Messiah. And immediately Jesus told them why. Jesus

told his followers, "If you think that this is about a moment of pride, think again. The real coming of the Christ means me, Jesus, enduring the humiliation and punishment of evil people. It means me suffering and dying on a cross. And it means me rising from the dead three days after my death."

This was mind-blowing knowledge. This was God revealing Godself to all of humankind as Jesus, the Christ, and then telling the world, "Shush! Wait! I am not your kind of savior. To really know the God who will save you, you must know how much God knows what it's like to be just like anyone else who dares to be humble, with the love of God in their heart. You want to know a God who is power and might, the way that you know power and might. You want a God who will end the story the way that you want it to end. But God's not done with God's story. The story is not about knowing the ending. The story is about being known by God, the beginning and ending of all stories. The story is about what we do in God's story."

[NEBULA] There is one important thing that we have learned by looking at all of the stars in the universe, and that's that the universe is still being born. There are places out there called nebulas, and in those nebulas, we can see that new stars are still being created in the universe. God's not done with creation. The story of creation is still beginning, even though it's more than 13 billion years old. Every star that is born, every child that is born, every new day that is born, reminds us that claiming to know how things ARE can make us forget that God knows that whatever IS, except God's power and love, is subject to change. [BLANK]

Your story of faith, born of God, isn't done. Everything that you do, matters. Everything that we do as God's church, matters. It matters, because of the one thing that we know from faith: we are all known by God. God knows our minds. God knows our hearts. And, through faith in Jesus Christ, we can find, in our humble walk with God, everything that we need to know to live the story that becomes the new story of God's love on earth. What do you know? That God's not done with you yet. Trust in this knowledge, and live in it, now, and always. Amen.