

The Old Testament reading that we heard today teaches us about God knowing us. Have you thought about God knowing you? Do you think about it often? Listen again to some of what the Psalmist says:

*"O Lord, you have searched me out and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether."*

God knows you extensively. He knows your sitting down and your rising up. God knows you intimately. He discerns your thoughts. Before a word is on your tongue, the Lord knows it altogether.

If this is true, if the Lord knows us like this, then the Lord knew what was going on with Irene about two weeks ago. Irene died unexpectedly to us, but it wasn't unexpected for the Lord. The Lord knew her sitting down and her rising up. We speak of someone dying alone, but really no one dies alone. God was there. God knew. God knows you too.

But knowing that God knows you, that God sees you, is not a perfectly comforting thought. That knowledge can be rather unsettling. God knows everything? He knows even what nobody else knows? He saw even what was done in the dark? "Yes," the psalmist says, *"even the darkness is not dark to God. The dark is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with God."* Aren't there things that you've done in the dark, and it gives you comfort to know that nobody knows but you?

And the intimacy of God's knowledge is unsettling too. Thousands of thoughts go through your head that you are quite glad that nobody else is aware of. God, however, knows these things. He knows them better than we even know ourselves.

So knowing that God knows you is not completely comforting. What is also necessary to know is that God is for you and not against you. Then God knowing all things might be kind of embarrassing, but if he is for me and not against me, then at least this is not terrifying. If only God would not look at us according to our sins, but according to his grace!

And this is not just wishful thinking. It is spoken to us from yet another remarkable passage that the family chose to be read for this funeral. I'd like to pull out something that the apostle Paul said in our Epistle reading from Romans chapter 5.

He said that Christ died for the ungodly. Think about what that means. To be ungodly means that you are not like God, that you are opposed to God, that you haven't followed his ways. You've done things that God doesn't want you to do. You think things that you shouldn't think. And it wasn't like God was unaware of all of this when he decided to redeem us by the death of Christ. God knew it all. He knows our sitting down and our rising up. Darkness and light are all the same to him. He knows our thoughts. And, yet, knowing all this full well Christ died for them.

Paul says, *"God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* Here is yet another component. God doesn't just put up with us. There is positive love for us, which is amazing when you consider that he knows all things. We all know that we have not been loveable, and yet God has loved us so much that he has given up his Son, his dearest treasure.

And so we have some thoughts here that are quite powerful: God knows everything. God is in control of everything. He searches out the paths for us. And what is all important is that God is for you and not against you in our Lord Jesus Christ. That you may know this, believe this, and through faith in Christ be

justified is why God sends out the saving message of his Gospel to all the earth. It is why he baptizes us so that we may be born again by the water and the Holy Spirit. It's why God gives us Jesus's flesh to eat and his blood to drink, as Jesus talks about in our Gospel reading from John chapter 6. Jesus says, "This is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

So let's apply this to Irene. Here are facts: Irene was baptized into Christ. Nobody can change that. She has forever been baptized into Christ. Irene was catechized and confirmed the Christian faith as being her own. She lived as a Christian, going to where the Word of God was preached and where Christ's sacrament was distributed to her. She continued to live the Christian life until the end, even though she was no longer able to make it to church.

Only a couple weeks before she died I visited her and I remember speaking to her about the importance and great benefit of believing Jesus's words in the Lord's Supper. I encouraged her to believe Jesus when he says that this bread is his body which is given for her, and this cup is God's testament to her for the forgiveness of her sins. I could tell that she was eager to believe those very things.

So when the time was right, God brought her home to himself in the way that he wanted to. It might not be the way that we think best—we like to be with those we love when they die. But it is much more important and beneficial that God was with her, and that God was for her. God wanted to bless her and has and is blessing her. He will continue to bless her, especially on the last day when he will raise up her mortal remains to immortality and incorruption.

And there is a lesson that is here also for all of us. We should not think that our own death is going to be visible from far off and cannot come unexpectedly. We should not think that we will always have time to change our ways or change our thoughts. Death can come at an hour that we least expect.

But if you will arm yourself with what God reveals in our readings today you can face whatever God might bring you with joy and confidence—even if it should be the end of your earthly life. If you are awake or if you are sleeping, if you are sitting down or if you are standing up, know that God has justified the ungodly in the death of Jesus our Savior. If death comes calling for you today, tonight, or tomorrow you are ready for God's summons if you believe that God is for you in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Irene knew our Lord; she believed in him. This is a good example that we all can follow, and if we do, we will not be disappointed.