

Reflection for 26th October 2025

Readings:

Jeremiah 9:23-24

Psalms 46:1-11

Philippians 3:4b-11

John 17:20-26

As always, a wee reminder that I'm not preaching, just sharing my thoughts (which have been checked by Nick) on today's readings and theme.

"Heavenly Father, may all our thoughts and words reflect our faith in you, and may our faith in you guide our lives. Amen"

Knowing God.

What does it mean to know someone? - is it different from having a relationship with them? *Growing a Relationship with God* is dealt with in next week's **sermon**. So it seems that knowing God is not the same as a relationship with God.

Oh boy, I found this a hard one to reflect on.

I decided to start by asking myself - how to do we get to **really** know a **person**? We feel we know some people **well** after just a short time of acquaintance. With others, we might have known them for years, but we don't know them **well** at all.

It's hard enough to define knowing a fellow human well; how much harder it is to define knowing **God** well!

But let's imagine a scenario, a story if you like, where God has just moved into one of the new houses in Penicuik. God is a Woman in this story (and why not!).

So! Once upon a time - a stranger moved to Penicuik. A friend tells you that one of their neighbours bumped into this woman in Tesco the

other day, that she was called God, and this neighbour exchanged a few words with her at the checkout. God seemed a nice enough sort of person.

You then see a new woman in your Monday morning exercise class at St Mungo's hall. You guess it might be God and you chat to her on the way out. God seems a bit wistful. She's been in Penicuik a few weeks and hasn't really got to know anyone yet. You invite her for a coffee at the Storehouse.

So you meet up with God and you chat together about this and that - nothing too deep. You tell God about yourself, your family, your interests, your home, last year's holiday. God is a good listener. You discover that God is interested in nature and just meeting and chilling out with people. God doesn't say much about Her family and you don't like to probe too much.

Over the next few months, God comes to St James church every now and then - you exchange a few pleasantries over a cup of tea after the service.

You still see God at your exercise class. You occasionally bump into God in town. You meet up with God another couple of times for coffee in the Storehouse, and once in the Craigie for a change. God is a **REALLY** good listener and you sometimes find yourself offloading more than you intended.

You discover that God is volunteering at the food bank. One day you see Her in deep conversation with a homeless man on the street. God is doing an awful lot of talking. You wonder what on earth she has to say to someone like that. She's never said all that much to you.

One day, you fall ill. It's a really nasty dose of the flu. You live alone, and apart from a friend who offered to call in when they could with shopping etc, you're facing this without help. After a couple of horrible days, you're flat out in a semi doze on the sofa when someone walks in quietly through the back door. It's God, of all people! She brings a bowl of warm water and gently helps you wash your hot and sweaty face and hands. She brings you a glass of refreshing orange juice and a couple of paracetamols. She tidies and cleans around your room, then sits with you a while. She then goes into the kitchen and prepares some vegetable soup and brings it to you on a tray, with some roses she's picked from her garden.

She stays quietly in the room with you for a couple of hours, then helps you to bed, makes sure you're dosed up, with plenty of water to hand and says she'll come back tomorrow.

And so this goes on for a couple of weeks until you're well.

You can't thank God enough. You want to give her a gift to show appreciation - but she shakes her head and smiles and says, the biggest gift you can give is to get to know her better. You're not sure what to make of that.

Well, you get back into your normal life, and you still see God around town. She still seems to be involved with those homeless people, that man in particular - she still has a lot to say to that one. And you hear stories of her looking after other folk who are ill and alone.

After another few months, you realise that you haven't seen God for some long time. There's a rumour she's gone off to Gaza to volunteer as an aid worker.

There's a niggle at the back of your mind. You feel you've missed something.

One day, on an impulse, you look out the homeless man that God talked to so much. This chap is now a volunteer in the food bank and looks like he was doing a lot better.

"Hello", you say, "You're quite friendly with God, aren't you?"

"Aye, yes I am", is the reply.

You say: "I've not seen Her around lately, I've heard She's gone to Gaza to volunteer. Is that right?"

"Aye, that's right, she's gone to Gaza", is the reply.

You carry on: "I couldn't help noticing that God talked to you a lot. I always wondered what She was saying to you. She never said much to me about herself when we met."

You can't stop: "You see, I'm so busy all the time. I knew She wanted to meet people, and I did have coffee with her a few times, and chatted to her at exercise class and church and She was wonderful when I was ill..... "

You carry on talking at some length while the homeless person looks at you and listens.

...and you end up with "... I wish I'd got to know Her better. Do you feel like that?"

"Oh, I think I know Her quite well", is the reply. "An **incredible** woman - the things She told me about her life and work! She arranged for someone to give me some practical advice and help, and she said things which made me feel stronger and better in myself. She put things in place to **make** things better. I listened to her, and went along with her suggestions because they were so good! And now I'm able to help other people who are struggling. Yes, I feel I know God well"

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Well, That's the end of my simple story, imagining how I could get to know God if God were a person just moved to Penicuik. Of course, it's not like that is it? God isn't a person. But can we use our experience with getting to know people, to get to know God?

The thing is, much of the Bible, including our bible readings today, are wonderful for telling us what God is **like**, but everything we read about God in the Bible (and elsewhere) are about **other people's** experiences of God. Not our own personal experiences.

So in today's readings we hear that Jeremiah experienced God as "the Lord who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth," ...and that God delights in these things. Much like God in my story I suppose!

The beautiful psalm for today tells us that "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble".

Paul's letter to the Philippians is Pauls' personal account of his own knowing and experiencing of God, and that everything else in his life (that he was once so proud of) is worthless compared with knowing Christ.

It's interesting that Paul says he "**wants** to know Christ" - as if he felt, at the time of writing, that he didn't know Christ (or God) as he wished - it was a work in progress.

This is also reflected in John's Gospel reading when Jesus says:

"I have made you (that's God) known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them."

The disciples have listened to Jesus' teachings and observed his life in action - and come to know God that way, through Jesus Himself. And this was a constant process - listening to, observing and experiencing

God's wisdom and love as shown by Jesus. They learnt that God's love is permanent and within their own beings.

In my story, there were two ways of getting to know God as a person - experiencing God's compassion and help when ill, and listening to God and acting on God's "advice" (if you like).

These are two ways that **help me** in my "getting to know God" journey. The first way - In the words of the service for Reserved Sacrament, the ones that Joy referred to a couple of weeks ago:

"You have made humankind in your image; each one of us is fashioned in your likeness, and we are able to recognise your face in the faces of our brothers and sisters."

It helps me to **know** God, by noticing and experiencing God's love, care and compassion in the words and actions of ordinary people around me, person to person, but God-inspired.

The way that the Homeless person in my story got to know God also helps me.. to try to make time to be still and **listen** for God's voice. After all, we probably don't get to know anyone well if we never **EVER** listen to them.

Wordless prayer is something I really want to make time for. My life, like many others', can be full of commitments and an overloaded brain! I need God's Peace to listen to God's voice within me.

So those are my very simple personal thoughts, just two of the things that I think work for me in getting to know God. What works for you may be different. Especially if you live alone and perhaps experience too much quiet. In those circumstances, you might better get to know God in other ways. Perhaps you experience and get to know God in the beauty and intricacies of creation, in human creativity, in the hug of a

loved one, in a sudden inexplicable awareness of God's love encompassing you.

The great thing about getting to know God is that He's always there around and within us, and it's never **ever** too late to make time to find ways of getting to know God better.

Amen