

## **“Knowing the One Who was Sent”**

by Greg Smith-Young (Elora-Bethany Pastoral Charge)

Continuing a series on the Gospel of John

John 7:25-36

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At that point some of the residents of Jerusalem began to ask, *“Isn’t this the man they are trying to kill? Yet here he is, speaking publicly, and they say nothing to him! Have our rulers in fact concluded that he is the Messiah? But we know where this man is from; when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from.”*

Then Jesus, still teaching in the temple courts, cried out, *“You know me? You know where I am from? I am not here on my own authority, but the One who sent me is true. You do not know him, but I know him because I am from him and he sent me.”*

At this they tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come. Still, many in the crowd believed in him. They said, *“When the Messiah comes, will he perform more signs than this man?”* The Pharisees heard the crowd whispering such things about him. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees sent temple guards to arrest him.

Jesus said, *“I am with you for a short time, and then I am going to the One who sent me. You will look for me, but you will not find me. Where I am, you cannot come.”*

The Jewish opposition said to one another, *“Where does this man intend to go that we cannot find him? Will he go where our people live scattered among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks? What did he mean when he said, ‘You will look for me, but you will not find me,’ and ‘Where I am, you cannot come?’”*

John 7.25-36. New International Version (alt)

Knowing Jesus . . . I have this idea that if we could just go back . . . if we could walk alongside him, listen to him, ask him our questions . . . then we would understand him, and our belief would be stronger.

My fantasy is proven wrong by the people who actually had those opportunities. Time and again, Jesus left them with more questions, more wonderment, more confusion, and often more hostility. No matter what they thought they knew of him, he slipped out of their grasp. Whenever they were sure they had him, he proved impossible to hold.

He still is. We try to figure Jesus out. It’s not that he keeps himself from us. Jesus is remarkably transparent, genuinely up-front. Yet he constantly confronts what we think we know. And there is always so much to him.

## II

The reading starts off with conversation about where Jesus came from. If you know where someone comes from, then you understand them better.

*“Tell me about your childhood”* my therapist asks. Those you come from shape who you are. Working on my genealogy, I thrill at discovering ancestors from centuries ago. I like discovering stories more. Especially stories of ordinary people overcoming hardship and taking risks. They are my family! Maybe in them, I discover something of myself.

Folks agreed: Jesus was impressive! Some were thinking he might be the Messiah. Except, they knew him.

Centuries of waiting for the Final Champion and King for God’s People had sprouted all sorts of ideas about what the messiah would be like. They had this saying: *“Three things come wholly unexpected — a scorpion, a Godsend, and the Messiah.”*<sup>1</sup> Wholly unexpected, the Messiah would come out of nowhere and mysteriously arrive.<sup>2</sup>

But Jesus was no mystery. They knew where he was from. *Jesus of Nazareth!* Nazareth was not much, but it was somewhere. Jesus had a hometown. His feet were stained with its Galilean soil. He had a family, a biography. He was not some sudden visitation, arriving from nowhere. They knew him. Which seemed to disqualify Jesus.

But Jesus said they did not know him. They knew a lot about him, but not him.

To know him, you need to know that he has been sent. You need to know his Sender.

## III

(Meanwhile, the authorities are trying to arrest Jesus. They fail because, we are told, “his hour had not yet come.” Which implies that, whatever “his hour” means, it will be coming.)

Having shown that he has been sent, that he has a Sender, Jesus turns to where he is going. To know Jesus, we need to know his destination.

Let’s suppose that, two weeks ago, I went to Washington, D.C. If I was going for the Friday, to celebrate President Trump’s nomination, you might now know some things about me. If instead I was going for the Saturday, to stand with the women protesting the President, you would know other things. And if I was going for the Saturday night to watch the

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John, A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 485. I changed the order; it was “the Messiah, a Godsend, and a scorpion.”

<sup>2</sup> Justin Martyr wrote of a conversation he had with a Jew named Trypho in the mid-2nd century, during which Trypho said, “The Christ, even after his birth, is to remain unknown and not [even] to know Himself and to be without power, until Elijah comes and anoints Him and reveals Him to all.” (Quoted in Bruner, 485) This seems remarkably parallel to the beginning of Jesus’ public work, with his baptism by John (cf. Elijah).

Capitals play the Stars, something else. Knowing where someone is going tells you something about them.

Jesus says he is going away. Shortly. They won't be able to find him, nor follow after him.

They scratch their heads. Maybe Jesus is planning to escape to "the Dispersion." The Greek word is *diaspora*. It's a scattering, like seeds. Through centuries of exiles and upheavals, Jews had scattered into many nations. This included the Greek-speaking ones throughout the Mediterranean region.<sup>3</sup> They wonder if Jesus is planning to flee there for safety.

Jesus is planning nothing of the sort. Certainly not an escape to safety. He is going into the heart of danger and destruction. However, his destination is the One who sent him.

I wonder if the attempts to arrest him, and understanding that while his "hour" is not yet, it will be soon, gets Jesus thinking of what is ahead: arrest and trials, torture and execution on a cross, and resurrection. He sees all those together as going back to the One who sent him.<sup>4</sup>

#### IV

To get Jesus, understand that his whole life is held in relationship with the One who sent him. Jesus is entirely shaped by his purpose, his mission.<sup>5</sup>

Jesus describes himself as the "Son" of God the Father. It is from his Father that Jesus has learned. It is his Father whom he reflects and honours. His Father sent him. Jesus is a "man on a mission" doing his Father's will.<sup>6</sup> He is not begrudging or forced to. It is his greatest desire.<sup>7</sup>

The mission of God — Father, Spirit and Son — is to bring life for the world. God's mission is to defeat those powers of Evil, Sin and Death which pollute and pervert and destroy life. God's mission is to save, renew, and restore Life. That's the Father's mission, so it is Jesus' mission. To know Jesus, know Who sent him. To know Jesus, know why he was sent. God loves life! So giving life is what Jesus was sent for.<sup>8</sup> Everything about him — from Nazareth (and Bethlehem before), through to his cross (and the empty tomb after), and everything in between — everything about Jesus is held within this great purpose, this

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<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish\\_diaspora#Pre-Roman\\_diaspora](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish_diaspora#Pre-Roman_diaspora)

<sup>4</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (I-XII)* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 318.

<sup>5</sup> The word "mission"—*missio* in Latin—means "to be sent."

<sup>6</sup> See John Bowen, *Evangelism for 'Normal' People* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002) and especially his chapter "'So I Send You': How Jesus Gets Us Involved." Much of what follows comes from Bowen's excellent discussion of the "sent" and "sending" mission of Jesus.

<sup>7</sup> Once, his friends were trying to get him to eat, but he said "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. (John 4:34)

<sup>8</sup> To see how Jesus connects his "being sent" with his mission of life, see John 3:17, 5:24, 6:39, 6:44, and especially 17:3.

mission, this identity of God. Everything about him is held within God's love: the love of the Son and the Father, and them both with the Spirit.

V

Jesus asked, "*You know me? You know where I come from?*"<sup>9</sup> Now we do . . . a little.

Then he said, "*the One who sent me. . . . You do not know him, but I know him because I am from him and he sent me.*" The One who sent Jesus . . . we do not know? We think we do. We know what God is like.

Do we? Jesus says no, we do not.

Jesus makes an astonishing claim. To know God, to know who God is and what God is like, we need to know him, know Jesus.

The great reformer, Martin Luther, wrote this:

*. . . we accept Christ and adhere to him in such a manner that we neither speak nor treat of God without having [Jesus] in mind. . . . [Luther then added sarcastically], Let others speculate brilliantly about God. . . .*<sup>10</sup>

Knowing Jesus, we don't speculate. We watch and listen. Watch what he does. Listen to what he says. And see and hear God.

Dale Bruner said:

*It is Jesus' claimed knowledge of God that makes Jesus so unique — and this makes those who trust Jesus want to know him much better than we do. We sense in getting to know [Jesus] better we will be getting to know The God Who Sent Him better.*<sup>11</sup>

Know Jesus better, and know God better.

Knowing Jesus, what do we know of God? We see that when his hour had finally come . . . "*knowing that he had come from God and was returning to God . . . Jesus got up from the table and took off his robes . . . picked up a linen towel and tied it around his waist . . . poured water into a washbasin . . . began to wash their feet.*"<sup>12</sup>

This is Jesus. This is God!

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<sup>9</sup> Jesus' words at the start of verse 28 can be understood as either an affirmative statement (i.e., they do know him and where he is from) or a questioning of their assumed knowledge (i.e., do they really know him and his origins?) In my translation, I chose the latter as better capturing the flow of Jesus' whole statement to them. See Bruner, 485.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Bruner, 485.

<sup>11</sup> Bruner, 483.

<sup>12</sup> John 13:3-5 (CEB)