

"Good to know!" It's a phrase we love to attach to the odd-but-essential insights and idioms that warning labels, our friends, and well-intentioned parents throw our way. Who would've thought that peanut butter "may contain nuts," or that the coffee you just purchased at McDonalds would be hot, or that "money doesn't grow on trees"? These are Weird and obvious statements, but nonetheless, good to know. Even Jesus isn't immune from offering up such insights. Like when he says, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?" Weird.. Strange.. Obvious. Nonetheless...Good to know.

The world we live in is filled with seemingly strange, but potentially useful, facts and insights. You know, the kind of quirky truths that can catch you off guard when you first hear them, but are legitimate enough to warrant a bit of space in your brain. Like, for example, the fact that coconuts kill more people every year than sharks do. Good to know. Or...that it is against the law to burp, or sneeze inside a church in Nebraska. Good to know. Or...that in the 1830's ketchup was sold as medicine. Good to know. We take such inane truths and store them away, digging them out of the recesses of our brains, to rescue a struggling conversation at a dinner party, or for that moment when we happen to be a contestant on *Jeopardy!* and the category is "19th century medicines now used as condiments." Good to know.

Scripture, as well, is full of "good to know" truths -- insights that we are certain are somehow applicable to our lives, and to our very existence in this world, even if we can't immediately find an application for them. Take the book of Proverbs for example. Whoever blesses his neighbor with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, will be counted as cursing. In other words, wait until your neighbor has showered, and eaten a bowl of cereal, before you shout blessings over the fence at them. Good to know.

Jesus' words to his disciples in our Gospel story from Matthew, are chalked full of "good to know" insights. They come at us -- no matter how many times we've studied them, or heard them preached in a sermon-- with a tone that can feel harsh when read, and they can seem to lack context from the stark picture that they paint for us. After all, prior to this moment the picture Matthew has painted for us has been largely positive for Jesus and his followers. Yes, John the Baptist had been murdered, remember the daughter of Herodias had asked for his head on a platter...but for Jesus and his merry band of twelve it's been: miracles, healings, profound parables and victorious verbal battles with the religious elite. Plus, just a few verses earlier, Peter had the greatest "a-ha moment" of human history, clearly confessing that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

Yet in our story today, all of a sudden here comes Jesus with a list of stark and strange insights about following him that have the capacity to jar us out of our joy. And they are overflowing with such truth, that we can't and we shouldn't ignore them. In fact, we cannot help but sense they'll come in handy sometime soon. You might even say, they're good for us to know, so let's examine a few.

Our narrative this morning marks the beginning of a decisive new phase in Jesus' mission, as he begins to march toward his inevitable death. In fact, toward the end of his ministry he declares to his disciples, on more than one occasion, that he would need to die. And the fact that Jesus is not surprised by the tragic events that are about to unfold, demonstrate to us that he saved us with his eyes wide open. Good to know! Look at verse twenty one. Although it can be tempting to see Christ as a fortuitous Savior, thrust to the cross, rather than one who embraced it and steadily pursued it on our behalf, Christ perceived his path of righteousness (as one marked by suffering.) He understood his ultimate trial -- as one of death to be vindicated through life, and that it would help his disciples, and us, to begin to

shape an understanding of how we are to see our own lives, following in his footsteps.

Jesus doesn't need us to protect him, or defend him for that matter, but rather he calls us to follow him. We're his disciples, not members of his entourage. In an entourage, there's the star at the center, the one around whom all the others orbit, and who live off of his or her awesomeness. Part of the job then is to protect the shine of the star, to help him or her perpetually look good, and in doing so you are protecting the glow that you get to live in. This is, in essence, what Peter is trying to do in his famous attempt at talking Jesus out of the cross in verse twenty two. He assumes there must be a better, shinier path for his beloved and famous teacher and friend, -- and the rest of his entourage of twelve to travel on. But Jesus reminds Peter, and us, that our task is not to protect Jesus, but to follow him. Good to know!

To "find" ourselves, we must be willing to "lose" ourselves. *This is also very good for to know.* Just look at verses twenty four through twenty five. Discipleship, Jesus tells us, is counter-intuitive in this sense. In the same way that we don't protect Jesus from his path, we must not protect ourselves from it either. In this broken world, everything is backwards. We will only discover the greatness of God, when we know and experience our very human limits. And we fight against this truth in a thousand different ways -- in our living, in our praying, and even in our expectations of how ministry should be done here at First Lutheran. And yet, we must always temper ourselves with the truth that God's grace is located at the end of our rope, not at the top of it.

There will be a reward in the end when Christ returns. This, my friends, is really good to know! Check out verse twenty seven. Sure, we're not told what the vindication will be for those who die to self through their faith in Christ, but there will be vindication. Will it be some kind of parade around the pearly gates? Will it

be a monetary prize? If so, what currency will be used in the new creation? Euros? Dollars? Bitcoins? The lack of detail would be bothersome, if Jesus hadn't proven himself so trustworthy through His resurrection. So while we don't know just what this "reward" will look like, we can be absolutely certain that there will be one. Good to know, especially on days when the road of discipleship is, as predicted by Jesus, decidedly dark.

The world we live in, as I'm sure you are aware, is filled with strange and painfully obvious information. For example, dumbwarnings.com is a website that compiles the world's dumbest warning labels found on all kinds of products. For example, a Zippo lighter that warns users "Do not ignite in face" or the warning on a bottle of Bayer Aspirin that says, "Do not take if allergic to aspirin." And while these may be obvious to most sober individuals, the sad fact is that the only reason such warnings are placed on products in the first place, is because someone, somewhere, wasn't as wise as the rest of us. Someone did, in fact, ignite a lighter in their face, and perhaps set their hair on fire. So this information is useful to somebody. Good to know!

And perhaps that's how these insights from Jesus strike you: strange, weird, true, and obvious. And yet, for a good number of people who attend churches throughout the world, who claim to be disciples of Christ in our own country, who declare themselves to be followers of Jesus, especially those who walk the streets of our neighborhoods -- - the idea of a God who chooses suffering in order to save us is strange; - the idea of discipleship as discovering God at the end of me, rather than in the best of me is new;- the idea that our ultimate reward is guaranteed now, but not delivered until *later* is foreign. But, you guessed it, it's all "good to know" - - essential to know – and sadly many still don't yet know it. Or at the very least they need to be reminded of it.

Perhaps our take home for today, is for us to figure out which of Jesus' strange but essential, tough but true, "good to know" insights from our Gospel lesson are needed by us these days? Is our picture of Jesus a little too safe? Do we know anyone who may be at a particularly low point in their life, someone who needs to be reminded that they are, now, closer than ever to the goodness of God? Are we aware of any people who are near the end of their existence in this world, fighting for breath, and wondering if it's all been worth it? If so, wouldn't it be good for them to know, and isn't it good news for us to know, that a reward has already been secured for us and is just within reach.

As you contemplate the truths we find in scripture, let me leave you with a few random insights found outside of the Bible. Did you know that a regulation golf ball has three hundred and thirty six dimples. Are you aware that John Lennon's first girlfriend was named Thelma Pickles? Have you discovered yet, that the plastic bag you brought your groceries home in, is not a toy. Perhaps all these things are good to know and maybe they'll even come in handy at some upcoming trivia night you attend, or the next time you are stuck in an insanely dull dinner conversation.

If such obscure facts can seem even remotely useful, how much more are the words of Jesus, in today's text, worthy of some space in our brains and in our hearts! We can park the truth that "Jesus doesn't need us to protect him" right next to "Jimmy Carter was the first president born in a hospital." You never know when we'll need to access such truths, but something inside us tells us we will. They're both good to know; one just a little more than the other. Thanks be to God. Amen.