

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost
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How do you know God? How can you be confident that you really know God? That's been a question that has haunted us people of faith for a millennium. We see Moses today talking to the people in his time offering statues. I think a statue is like a guide that guided people in their relationship with God so that they could have more confidence in their relationship and what they perceived God was in fact God. And then we see James and Jesus critiquing people who have guides for their relationship with God but have sort of hollowed them out – despiritualized them, sort of taken the heart out, so James and Jesus are challenging the people of their time and challenging us to go back into our hearts and ask that question again. How do we know God; how do we know God and how can we be sure that the relationship we're building and the voices we're hearing are actually God's. Christians got involved in this pretty early of course and so the church that came from the Bishop of Rome, the Roman Catholic Church, felt there were actually two ways to really be sure that God's revelation of God's self was coming clear. First was through scripture and the second was through the lived knowledge of the church. We would call that tradition. So scripture and tradition are the two ways in the Roman Catholic Church that you really know God is God and you look there to the lived experience of the generations who have come before and to scripture. That worked for a while – for a good while – until dear Martin Luther came along and was very concerned about the lived experience of the church and very critical of it, so he felt that tradition side, that lived experience could not be dependable, that there's too much humanity there. So Luther said, only scripture – “sola scriptura” – only in scripture can we really be confident that we hear God's voice and so for Luther, hearing scripture was sacramental. It was almost as if the inner workings of the ear were the direct physical contact between a believer and God. If you go to a protestant church you know that the sermon is the sacrament. Everything builds up to the sermon; at the end of the twenty minute sermon, you sing a hymn and you leave. It's the sermon that's the sacrament because of that influence of Martin Luther, who felt that only scripture is guaranteed to deliver God to us. Around the same time as Luther, generally, across the English Channel there were English folks working on this same question and they came to a very Anglican Way. Richard Hooker encapsulates this the best I think. Hooker said, let's see – scripture – of course scripture reveals God and of course God can reveal God's own self through the lived experience of the church, so tradition too, but there's another place where we see God. Hooker said: your own experience can take you to God. Scripture's important, tradition's important and so is your experience. Hooker said those three things: scripture, tradition and experience are a stable way to be in relationship with God and then he compared it to something that all the English of his time knew well. He said; ‘when you milk your cow you sit on a three legged stool and it's very stable. This is the three-legged stool: scripture, tradition and experience. Well, five hundred years later, we gather to worship. For the last five hundred years we might be able to say that we have privileged experience. “It's what I think”. Ever get into a kind of a fun faith wrestling match? When someone says: well, it's what I believe! What

can you say? Its over; the argument's over. More than ever in our environment, we need scripture and tradition. We're experts on experience – its scripture and tradition. So let me invite you into a couple of prayer practices that go way back in time, that can help you further your own spiritual life, deepen in your maturity and hold yourself accountable, so you don't get off track. The first one is a simple practice called *Lectio Divina* – ever heard of it? It's an ancient practice, practiced in many monasteries centuries ago. It's very complicated, so listen carefully. Now the hardest part for Episcopalians is actually finding their Bible and the good news in *Lectio Divina* is that's the first step; you find your Bible. If it's propping open an important door, there's a really nice one for sale in the Bookstore, you can go get it, you can multi-task with the Bible. If it's holding up the table like it is at Ron Wesner's house – he said it in the Bookstore – Ron, there is a Bible in the Bookstore for you. So you find a Bible and you set it on a table or in your lap in a comfortable place where there are no distractions where you know you can reasonably expect to have five minutes. This is very demanding – five minutes to yourself. Then you flip the pages of the Bible – literally and let it stop at an undetermined place. You go like this without looking and put your finger down on some text and you start reading. Now the second hardest part comes next; you have to bring your imagination into this. A lot of us have had our imaginations removed at some point in the past; you have to bring that back, because in *Lectio Divina* the Holy Spirit works through your imagination. So you're reading away and as soon as you find something interesting or compelling, it might be a phrase, it might be a phrase of something that reminds you of something that happened in your life that week. It can be anything, but let the scripture be your point of departure and then pray that God will guide you through this reading to the place you need to be and then you let your mind wander and you ponder, you ponder that phrase or what that phrase brings up for you or the memory it releases and then five minutes later you close the Bible and you go on your day. I dare you – each one of you – I'm going to try it too. Each one you – try it this week – find your Bible. Give yourself five minutes in the morning or in the evening or mid-day. Let your imagination open; just point to a scripture and let it go and see where the Holy Spirit takes you. Do it for seven days; see what happens. Not only will you be opening the door of your experience, but you will be deeply grounded as you reflect in scripture and in the lived experience of the church. You will be Anglican on your three legged stool. There's another ancient prayer practice that comes to us from the British Isles, it comes from the Celts. It's called Soul Friendship. It's another ancient practice that allows us to really embrace our experience in a way that we are accountable. Soul Friends are people who come together simply to support each other's soul. There's no one that is more hierarchical than the other. No one's smarter than the other; these are equals. In our time Soul Friendship looks a lot like having a cup of coffee with a friend once a month; having a cup of tea every other week, but the Soul Friendship part is that the relationship is focused on your soul and on your friend's soul. Imagine that you are a mirror and you see that other person in a way that they can see themselves. It's a relationship of mirroring and accountability. A Soul Friend in this intentional accountability way is usually not one's spouse or life partner. Sometimes it's a person you don't know that well, but you find kind of interesting. Sometimes it begins with "Would you like to meet for a cup of coffee and just talk about our lives together. I find you engaging and interesting. Would you like to try that? It's called Soul Friendship and there's a book if you want to read about it, but let's just try

that – Soul Friendship. It's a deep and powerful way to open our lives with confidence to God's love and the experience of God, but do it in a way that we are accountable and that we're linked into scripture and also into tradition. This is the Anglican Way: to reach back and grab beautiful treasures out of our history. To dust them off, to make them new and to bring them forward into our lives. Now as the seasons are turning, as the nights cool off, as it's a little darker in the morning and evening, each one of us has that sense, don't we, that things are turning, turning to a new season. Many of us order our lives around the academic calendar even if we hardly know anyone who's going to school any more, it's just in our bones. In this seasonal shift I think this scripture today and certainly our lived tradition invite all of us to ponder ways that we can ground our hearts in God and be accountable to each other.