

The Man Who Knew Too Much

The title of this sermon is the title of one of Alfred Hitchcock's most compelling suspense dramas, "The Man Who Knew Too Much." The plot involves a doctor and his wife and son vacationing in a North Africa setting. Just before he dies of a stabbing an Arab whispers a message to the doctor who is holding him in his arms. The message tells of an assassination scheme against a diplomat to be carried out in London. The assassins learn of the doctor's knowledge and therefore kidnap his son in order to silence him. From ~~their~~ their perspective "he knows too much."

I have thought about this theme for a long time. Its reality is to be found in places other than Hitchcock. The Bible, for example. It could be said that Jesus was to some of his contemporaries the man who knew too much. According to the Gospel of John Jesus was performing many signs and wonders that were dazzling onlookers. Some of them were inclined to follow him just because of these miracles. But obviously Jesus did not want them to follow him just because he did amazing things. In John we read: "Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, many believed in his name ~~when~~ they saw his signs which he did; but Jesus did not trust himself to the^m, because he knew all men and needed no one to bear witness of man; for he himself knew what was in man." (2:23-25) Indeed, one of the brilliant characteristics of Jesus was that he could read human nature so clearly. As enemies were gathering against him he knew what was in their hearts and minds. In the Upper Room as he sat with his twelve disciples just before his arrest, he knew what one of them, Judas, had done to betray him. He could look into a person's eyes and know what was happening in a human heart. In fact, it could be said that he knew too much for his own good. Hence his enemies sought to kill him.

No doubt, in a number of ways, you have been troubled by persons who "know too much." Think about some of these ways for a few minutes.

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Is this not why we find some people insufferable? I think it is safe to say that we find some people irritating, for this reason.

There is, of course, the "know-it-all," the person who always is popping off with presumed knowledge on just about every subject. It is not pleasant to try and carry on a conversation with such a person. In my college fraternity there was such a man. Besides assuring us how he had won World War II, he was a know-it-all. We found him obnoxious.

I remember seeing once an ad in the classified section of a newspaper which read: "Set of brand new encyclopedias for sale. Sixteen year old son knows everything." What can you do with such a person except to get out of his way.

There is a strong hint about this problem in one of Paul's letters to the Corinthians. The problem among the Christians was whether to eat food that had been sacrificed to idols. Though many were troubled by this some were absolutely certain that they knew what was the right thing to do. Paul treats this as an ethical issue and counsels that those who know so much about what is right should not enforce their knowledge on others. He wrote: ["]Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that 'all possess knowledge.' 'Knowledge (however) puffs up, but love builds up. If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. But if one loves God, one is known by him.'" (I Cor. 8:1,2, RSV) It is quite human to be "puffed up" by what you know; but the loving Christian will not go around intimidating others with his or her knowledge.

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It is also true that knowledge can be dangerous to your health, or the ~~health~~ peace of mind of others.

It is alleged that doctors and nurses make poor patients themselves because they know too much. As they are being examined or diagnosed they fret and worry about the symptoms they discern. Their very knowledge may

Exaggerate their pains.

Sometimes people come to regret having shared too much with someone about themselves. This is a problem for pastors. In a moment of great crisis a person may let it "all hang out," only later to have regretted such an outpouring. In another of Hitchcock's compelling films this problem become acute. Late at night a man comes to a ~~pri~~ priest to confess, in the confessional booth, that he had committed a serious crime. This film is called "I Confess." Later, by a twist of circumstances, the priest is accused of the crime. It was a murder. But because the priest has sworn an oath of absolute confidentiality for those who come to make their confession, he will not reveal his true knowledge of the situation. He is found guilty of the murder, and still he will not reveal what he knows. Eventually, of course, the truth ~~xxx~~ emerges, but ~~not~~ ^{not} because the priest broke his confidence.

I am finding late in my life that it is troubling to have children who know so much. Recently two of my children have come up to me after different sermons and have scolded me for making statements of error. It happened that I had made references - in passing - to factors in their own fields of expertise, and I had either exaggerated or left out an important fact. Now not too many years ago I strongly encouraged them to enter these professional fields, but now I have to be careful what I say because they know too much!

Ned Larlin intimidation Pastor

A more serious and classic example of this is seen in the great play of Henrik Ibsen, "An Enemy of the People." Dr. Frederick Stock^Kmann is the medical officer of the Municipal Baths in a Norwegian town. In this capacity he receives a lab report indicating that the public baths which are greatly expanding the economy of this town are a threat to health because the water is poisonous and threatening death. Dr. Stockmann conveys this information to the town officials, including his brother who is the mayor. Naturally this causes an uproar full of resentment against the doctor. It is he who is perceived as the enemy, the enemy of the

people who threatens the prosperity of the town. Hence the town turns against him violently. Dr. Stockmann's last words in the play are these: "It is this, let me tell you - that the strongest man in the world is he who stands most alone." He stood alone because he was not only "An Enemy of the People," but "the man who knew too much."

Just this week I heard a proverb, new to me, spoken over the radio: "He who tells the truth must have one foot in the stirrup." (WBBM).

Near the end of his life when the Apostle Paul was put on trial under Roman justice, he made his defense before Festus, the Governor of Judaea. Festus seemed to take an interest in Paul, but this response is reported in Acts: "And as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, 'Paul you are mad; your great learning is turning you mad.'" But Paul replied: "I am not mad, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking the sober truth." (Acts 26:24,25, RSV) He ~~xxxxxx~~ who stands alone because he knows too much, will be considered mad. This is apparently what the ruling authorities, and even Pilate thought, about Jesus. It could be said that they put him to death because he knew too much.

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Before we leave this discussion let us come back to the Gospel of John which declares: "He knew what was in man." (2:25) On the one hand he knew the evil deviousness, the sinfulness that was in man, but he also knew the good and the worthy which are in all of us. He is really still the Man Who Knows So Much about what we can become.

It is always the genius of Jesus to so nurture each of us in his love that we discover our own true selves.

Often I have said that one of my convictions after nearly 50 years in the ministry is that many, many people have a low view of themselves. They suffer deeply, I believe, because they honestly think that they are of no worth. Somehow or other they have been convinced by others that they are no good. Hence they dwell in dark caves of self-despair and

self-loathing. Do you know that it is the work of this church, its calling in Christ, to proclaim ~~and~~ a Savior and a Rede^emer who will teach all human souls that they are children of God, and that they are precious in his sight?[?]

Following our Lincoln Seminar to Springfield, New Salem and Petersburg last month, I received ~~one day~~ a touching letter from a young woman who wrote these words:

I have been reading books about Lincoln and Mary Todd since ~~xxxx~~ the 3rd grade. All of ~~my~~ these years I have remained quiet about my interest in fear of people thinking that this was a "silly" hobby to have. I can't begin to tell you how excited I am that I have found a whole society of people interested in this subject. (Jody Haltenhof, June 28, 1990)

Now if this young woman could be encouraged to believe in herself because of joining a Society of Lincolnphiles, what does it suggest to us, the Church of Jesus Christ our Lord? Is it not our function to warmly embrace every human soul we meet, to make that person know that in Christ we have met someone who knows so much about us that we have come to believe in ourselves? In your neighborhood, in your workplace, in your office, or in your school, there is surely someone whom you pass every day who needs the encouragement of a warm friend and loving caring.

To some of you before I have shared my reason for wearing this cross around my neck when I preach. Many years ago during the training of a large confirmation class I noticed there was one little girl who seemed all alone. She did not mingle with the others. One day I invited her to stay after class and I asked her how she liked the class. "Well, the others," she said, "don't like me, they don't accept me." "But I like you, and I accept you," I said. On the day of Confirmation when all of the 9th graders were dressed in their angelic white robes, she came to me with a gift box. ~~It~~ it was ~~in~~ this cross which she had made for me." Ever since I wear it when I preach. I moved from that city and later tried to reach her, but my letters were ~~never~~ ^{not} answered. Eventually, after my persistence, I got a reply from her, telling me that she had met a Catholic boy and had married him. She was concerned *lest I disapprove,*

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Approve? The lovely picture of her and her husband and their little baby is hung on my desk lamp. I told her of my love for her and her family and how I always wear her cross when I preach. Everytime I put it on I think of the Man Who Knew So Much that he taught me that she is of infinite worth and that every human soul, no matter how weak or unsure or frail, is a child of God. The Man Who Knew Too Much knew too much to allow anyone to demean her or any other childreⁿ of God.