Knowing what you know, need to know and don’t know?

* Looking at and appreciating what we do know and have,
* Putting our knowledge into the context jigsaw puzzle and
* Understanding that what we don’t know doesn’t undermine the value of what we do know.
* God has a plan and He wants everyone to be an active part of it.

Just a few thoughts before we look at our passage today from the Book of Ephesians Chapter 1.

Let me show you a very short clip of Donald Rumsfeld, an American politician, at a press briefing.

[Play video]

In the clip he said the following:

1. There are known knowns – there are things we know we know, we also know
2. There are known unknowns, that is to say we know there are some things we do not know, but there are also
3. Unknown unknowns – the unknowns we don’t know we don’t know.

This applies to all aspects of life including science and as we will explore later, also in relation to God, Jesus and his plan for mankind.

We know we have a huge problem with coronavirus and what we need to do to delay its impact for us all to have a better chance of getting through it.

We know we need a vaccine but don’t know when we will have it.

There are also things about Coronavirus we don’t know we don’t know but in the future may become known and make a difference.

There are some other known knowns I now know which I discovered on the World Health Organisation website: www.who.int in relation to death figures and its causes – some of the headlines included:

* 1.78 deaths/second
* 107 deaths/minute
* 6390 deaths/hour
* 153,000 deaths/day
* 56 million deaths/year (UK – 600,000/year)

Over 5 million children under 5 die each year - approximately 15,000 a day

Top causes of death shown on the WHO site included heart disease, strokes, pulmonary conditions (blockage artery in the lungs) but number 4 was lower respiratory infections including pneumonia and flu – the most deadly communicable diseases accounted for over 50% of deaths in lower income groups but less than 7% in high income countries. Diabetes was also in the top 10. Road traffic injury deaths accounted for over 29%.

A United Nations report and related site explained that 7.6 million die each year as a result of a hunger related causes which equated to 21,000 deaths a day as a result of food insecurity – the day I wrote this (Friday) there was to date, a total of 467,710 confirmed cases of Coronavirus and a total of 20,947 deaths (similar figure to those who die of hunger related deaths each day throughout the year) – C19 deaths in UK were 422 although that number sadly continues to climb.

842 million people suffer from hunger which equates to 12% of the world’s population of over 7 billion.

I know that quite rightly coronavirus is our current crisis but I hope that when we get through it that the attention, focus and resources in relation to what we already know in relation to other causes of death, including known solutions will be more actively pursued. I am guilty of hearing terrible news but when I realise it is in another area of the world it loses its impact – just think of the thousands of deaths (55,000) a year due to war related violence, a Channel 4 website article looked at 2.3 billion people affected by flooding disasters in a 20 year period, in 2017 in Bangladesh 1,200 were killed and millions left homeless. Each of those deaths generates collateral harm to families, friends, communities and countries.

Some sobering known knowns we would perhaps rather not know but despite that known knowns that help us to appreciate and put into context with what we do have e.g. fresh water supply, sanitation, shelter, food, heat, political stability, wonderful public health service and support from numerous government, private and voluntary organisations.

Having set the scene with these concerning known knowns let us now look at some encouraging and exciting known knowns and known unknowns in today’s reading from Ephesians 1:1-14 New Living translation (NLT)

*Ephesians 1:1-14 NLT*

*[1] This letter is from Paul, chosen by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus. I am writing to God's holy people in Ephesus, who are faithful followers of Christ Jesus. [2] May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace. [3] All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ. [4] Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. [5] God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. [6] So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son. [7] He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins. [8] He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding. [9] God has now revealed to us his mysterious will regarding Christ-which is to fulfil his own good plan. [10] And this is the plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ-everything in heaven and on earth. [11] Furthermore, because we are united with Christ, we have received an inheritance from God, for he chose us in advance, and he makes everything work out according to his plan. [12] God's purpose was that we Jews who were the first to trust in Christ would bring praise and glory to God. [13] And now you Gentiles have also heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago. [14] The Spirit is God's guarantee that he will give us the inheritance he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people. He did this so we would praise and glorify him.*

There is a lot to discover in this passage as we found out when we commenced our first Zoom Bible study last Tuesday evening. I am going to highlight some areas that you can personally reflect on, work through for yourselves and then hopefully share with us next Tuesday evening when we carry on with our Bible study.

Let’s briefly look at the known knowns (some of which may link with known unknowns – which the answers to may be linked with unknown unknowns). We will pause after each one to allow the knowledge and truth to hopefully sink in and enable us to appreciate what we do know or will learn today.

V.3 Blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ

V.4 Before God created the world, He loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in His eyes

V.5 God decided in advance (‘predestined’ NIV) to adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ. This is what He wanted to do, and it gave Him great pleasure.

V.6 God has poured out His glorious grace on those who belong to His Son, Jesus

V.7 God is so rich in kindness and grace that He purchased our freedom with the blood of His son Jesus and forgave our sins

[The Voice translation says ‘visualise this: His blood freely flowing down the cross, setting us free! We are forgiven our sinful ways by the richness of His grace’] Jesus death and resurrection dealt with the power of sin, death, the devil and provided forgiveness.

V.8 He has showered His kindness on us, along with wisdom and understanding

V.9 God has now revealed to us His mysterious will regarding Christ [a previously unknown unknown] to fulfil His plan

V.10 The plan is at the right time to bring everything together under the authority of Christ – everything in heaven and on earth [God’s timing not ours]

V.11 Because we are united with Christ, we have received an inheritance from God, because He chose us in advance [predestined us], God makes everything work out according to His plan [in conformity, with the purpose of His will NIV]

V.12 First stage of the plan involved the initial Jewish followers of Jesus (linked to the author of this letter) who trusted in Him and became part of the plan, bringing praise and glory to God

V.13 And the second stage, included those to whom the letter was written (and subsequently us) Gentiles (non-Jews), who became part of God’s plan when we became an active participant in it, having

* Heard the truth – the Good News that God saves you
* Believed in Jesus Christ (free will i.e. our decision)
* He identified you (us) as His own [adopted sons and daughters] by giving you (us) the promised Holy Spirit

V.14 The Holy Spirit is God’s guarantee that He will give us the inheritance He promised and that He has purchased us to be His own people. He did this so that we would praise and glorify Him.

Hopefully you can see there are numerous known knowns for us to appreciate, consider and praise God for, even if some of them raise known unknowns e.g. The Bible teaches about God choosing us in advance before the creation of the world (predestination) but also talks about us making a choice to believe in God and what He has promised through Jesus – Freewill versus predestination – how does that equate? A known unknown.

However, just because we don’t understand or have the answer to the known unknown it doesn’t alter the truth of the known knowns. Let me use a simple example. You are watching and listening to this talk on Facebook Live or on our Church website – you can see it and hear it - it is a known known BUT like me perhaps you do not understand how the technology actually makes it possible for this to happen – a known unknown for me but with some study I may come to turn that known unknown into a known known. But even those who do understand the theory of how it works I imagine there are aspects that are still known unknowns and even unknown unknowns. It doesn’t stop us relying on it though does it – we know what we need to know in order to benefit from it.

To bring our thoughts together before we conclude with the prayer in Ephesians Chapter 1 a few bullet points to consider and accept when you do your own study of this Chapter.

* We don’t know all the answers
* There are lots of known unknowns and I imagine a nearly infinite number of unknown unknowns
* It is OK to ask questions and explore the Bible and the World for answers – known unknowns may become known knowns or reveal more known unknowns or discover a new unknown unknown – an adventure
* There are wonderful mysteries, some of which, as we learned in this passage, are being revealed to us, but because we are not God we can’t possibly understand everything with our human minds – we need to explore and question but realise our limitations
* God through Jesus and the Holy Spirit (the Trinity another known unknown) is revealing what we need to know – sufficient for us to love and trust Him at His word – just think of the known knowns we have uncovered in just that short passage – the Bible has so many more.
* When questioning and exploring the Bible, and particularly what Jesus said, do not take verses in isolation, try and understand the context e.g. when, to who and why were the words originally written, where else is that subject mentioned in the Bible – fit the jigsaw puzzle pieces together – prayerfully asking God through His Holy Spirit to open your eyes to understand.
* It is essential to default where ever possible to looking at what Jesus said. One final example in relation to the passage we have been studying. In addition to reading the whole letter to the Ephesians, where earlier comments may be developed or explained later in the same letter, reflect on these words of Jesus in John’s gospel. The passage in John’s gospel covers similar topics to those we have already looked at in Ephesians but from another perspective, by taking jigsaw puzzle pieces from both passages, it will help our understanding and knowledge of those topics in a more complete way – as we discover more pieces of the puzzle.

*John 3:16-21 NIV*

*[16] For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. [17] For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. [18] Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. [19] This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. [20] Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. [21] But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.*

Perhaps look at this passage later and for yourself identify the known knowns and known unknowns – God may even reveal to you a previously unknown unknown?

Let us conclude with the prayer at the end of Ephesians Chapter 1:15-23 using the Voice translation as the basis.

Ephesians 1:15-23 Voice

[15] This is why, when I heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus that is present in your community and of your great love for all God's people, [16] I haven't stopped thanking Him for you. I am continually speaking to Him on your behalf in my prayers.

Here's what I say: [17] God of our Lord Jesus the Anointed, Father of Glory: I call out to You on behalf of Your people. Give them minds ready to receive wisdom and revelation so they will truly know You. [18] Open the eyes of their hearts, and let the light of Your truth flood in. Shine Your light on the hope You are calling them to embrace. Reveal to them the glorious riches You are preparing as their inheritance. [19] Let them see the full extent of Your power that is at work in those of us who believe, and may it be done according to Your might and power.

[Father May we remember]

(Friends,) it is this same might and resurrection power that [20] [You](He) used in the Anointed One [Jesus] to raise Him from the dead and to position Him at [Your] (His) right hand in heaven. There is nothing over Him. [21] He's above all rule, authority, power, and dominion; over every name invoked, over every title bestowed in this age and the next. [22] [You ] God [have] (has) placed all things beneath His feet and anointed Him as the head over all things for His church. [23] This church is His body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all.

Father thank you for the known knowns, the known unknowns and the unknown unknowns – increase our knowledge and love for you as our Father, Jesus our Lord and Your Holy Spirit that dwells within us - may we like those early followers trust you and bring praise and glory to your name.

Amen