

**Sunday, January 15, 2017 – Second Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**Preacher: Rev. Douglas J. Brouwer**  
**Sermon Title: “How do we know? (The way God reveals himself)”**  
**Scripture Readings: Psalm 19:11-6, 14 and Romans 1:18-23**

Note: With the sermon last week, we started a winter/spring sermon series on what we believe, based (loosely) on the Apostles’ Creed. Last week I made the case (using Augustine’s famous phrase *fides quaerens intellectum*, or faith seeking understanding) that believers want to know what they believe, they desire to know the content of their faith. Asking questions is the beginning point of faith and leads us closer to the heart of God, though many people, it is true, ask questions to distance themselves from God.

This week we move to the question, “How do we know?” In other words, how does God reveal himself to us? In theological terms, this is about “revelation.” We believe that God has revealed (and continues to reveal) himself – first in nature and creation (general revelation) and next in scripture (special revelation). We’ll save **special revelation** for next week and concentrate this week on what has come to be known as **general revelation**.

1. First, some definition: Christians say that God has revealed himself (and that we can perceive his presence) in nature, history, and human life in general. Psalm 19 tells us that “the heavens are declaring the glory of God.” In a very preliminary way, can you think of ways that nature, history, and human life tell us about God? In other words, what do we learn about God by reflecting on nature? On history? And on human life itself?
2. If you are a believer, that may seem like a relatively simply exercise, but consider this: Many, many people over the years have asked themselves these questions and have come to the conclusion that there is no God – or if there is, God’s character and will are unknown to us. Read the Romans lesson (1:18-23). It seems clear that for Paul the evidence is clear. He says unbelievers have “no excuse.” What do you say? How is it possible to look at the world (and at history) and to see no evidence of God’s hand in it? Do you agree with Paul?
3. Before I go too much further, I need to point out that even Christians have had serious reservations about general revelation. One of the best known is Swiss German theologian Karl Barth who was reacting to German Christians who claimed to find the “will of God” in an ideology of “blood and soil” and in the destiny of a “super race.” For Barth (and others) the knowledge of God we claim to receive from general revelation is untrustworthy and subject to misuse. Only the knowledge gained from scripture, he maintained, has any use for us. Perhaps you can think of other times and places in history where Christians have

made arguments “from nature” to support what now seems like a repugnant point of view. (One that comes to my mind is the support that slavery received from Christians – and Christian preachers – in the U.S. in the century before the Civil War.)

4. So, where are you in this debate? Do you reject the knowledge of God to be found in nature, history, and human life? Do you accept that there is something to be learned in these areas of life? I am undoubtedly in the latter camp, but I am very much aware of the limitations that come along with general revelation. Can you think of ways to use general revelation safely, cautiously, and with discernment?