

29<sup>th</sup> June 2023

## Knowledge

**“The Master said, ‘Yu, shall I teach you what knowledge is? When you know a thing, to hold that you know it; and when you do not know a thing, to allow that you do not know it; this is knowledge.’”**

Confucius, *The Analects*

There are 2,618 toilets in London’s Wembley Stadium. It was a “tie-breaker question” at a recent charity quiz. The toilets are for the use of the 90,000 spectators who’ve had access to 34 bars, 8 restaurants and 688 food and drink service points, using soft-drink dispensers that can pour 30,000 cups every ten minutes, and downing the 40,000 pints of beer that are served at half-time in a football or rugby-league match. Now you know!

Several decades ago, Rev Ian Pitt-Watson wrote a hymn based on Psalm 139, a Psalm I’m still reflecting on in morning worship in Iona Abbey. Pitt-Watson was both an Edinburgh divinity graduate and a graduate from London’s Royal Academy of music. Ordained by the Church of Scotland in the early 1950s, he served in St Giles Cathedral, as chaplain at Aberdeen University and in congregations in Dundee and Glasgow. Best known for his academic work, he went from teaching in Aberdeen to the position of Professor of Preaching and Practical Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary in California, from 1980 till his retirement. A talented hymn-writer, his paraphrase of Psalm 139 opens with this stanza:

*You are before me, God, you are behind,  
And over me you have spread out your hand;  
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,  
To high to grasp, too great to understand.*

We can gain *factual* knowledge, of course – and because I have the Wembley Stadium stats at my fingertips, I can amaze people at parties with *that* knowledge. And so can you now ... But in my faith journey, I’ve always related to Pitt-Watson’s phrase, “such knowledge is too wonderful for me”, when he considers his relationship with his God.

Confucius is right. What you know, you know; what you don't know, you don't know. That’s a pretty good place for my faith to be right now in Iona Abbey. Tomorrow I might know more and recognise even more that I don’t know. But today, this is knowledge, and that’s knowledge enough.

### **A prayer for today**

*Known and unknown, you are still my God – and that’s not dependent on me! Amen*

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