

A Walk Through the Psalms: God Knows
Psalm 139; Romans 8:26-31
Salem United Methodist Church; June 10, 2018
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For the next few Sundays we are delving into a few Psalms. The Psalms are a collection of Hebrew worship songs. They can be effective communication tools to help us express our feelings to God such as, joy, thankfulness, grief, guilt, abandonment. Today we are looking at Psalm 139, a Psalm that describes an all-knowing and ever-present God and our relationship with God.

There are few scriptures that speak to the intimacy, the closeness that exists between God and humans as Psalm 139. The writer acknowledges that God knows everything about us. God looks into every nook and cranny of our being. There is nothing that the Psalmist cannot do that God doesn't already know. God is omniscient. God knows every word we will say. God knows every thought we think. For the Psalmist God looks deeply into individuals and knows the entirety of our existence like no one else can. Even couples who have been married for a long time can't know everything about each other. A couple who were celebrating their fiftieth wedding anniversary was asked, "What is the best thing about being married for fifty years?" The husband stated, "After fifty years I think I know everything there is to know about my wife. Many times we are thinking the same thing. We can finish each other's sentences, but we are still getting to know each other. After fifty years, there is still lots more to discover." Even people who have a very close friendship can never know everything about the other. Only God knows everything about us. God knows each cell in our bodies, because God created it. Jesus said that God knows the number of hairs on our heads. God knew us when we were developing fetuses. Back in biblical times, ultrasounds weren't even thought about. Today parents watch their baby develop over the months through ultrasounds. As they hear and see the heart beat and see the budding limbs begin to move, the parents' faces shine with delight and their hearts are full to overflowing with love and joy. God's heart overflows with love and joy as we are "knit together our mother's womb." Thank you, God, for making us so marvelously.

The Psalmist also is aware that there is nowhere we can go that God isn't already there. God is not a distant observer or a God who put everything in motion and then left. We can't run away from God. God is always with us. St. Patrick echoed the words of this Psalm when he wrote, "Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ when I arise." Patrick knew the Son of God was with him all the time, omnipresent, no matter where he went. Astronauts realize God is with them as they orbit the earth or when they traveled to the moon. Soldiers on the battlefield discover that even in the hell of war, God is with them. Prisoners in solitary confinement have reported finding God in their cells. We go to the beach to be with God. And even when we go through the dark times of our lives, Emmanuel, God is with us, illuminating the darkness.

When I was a young adult woman, I going through a dark time in my life. I was struggling with self-esteem issues. I didn't know that as a woman I was worthy. I grew up in a male dominated world and received the message that women were not valued the same as men. This profoundly affected how I perceived God. I didn't believe God cared about me in the same way that God cared for men. The words of Psalm 139 helped to change my perspective. Knowing that God knew me before I was born and that God has always been with me gave me comfort. This Psalm helped me feel truly loved by God. There is no greater feeling than to know that God loves us, to know that God is with us. No matter where we have been, no matter what we have done, God loves us. Parents understand this type of love. Our children do things we don't want them to do. They rebel. They can even tell us that they

hate us. But no matter what they do or how far away they go, we still love them and will do anything to let them know that they are loved. So it is with God.

However, we can be uncomfortable with the fact that God knows everything about us and that we cannot get away from God. We might try to get away from God by denying God's existence. We might create our own space that doesn't include God. We think these are ways we can hide from God so that we can have the freedom to do and say the things we want to say. We can live by our own rules. It doesn't matter who gets hurt as long as we aren't the ones getting hurt. And sometimes we even want to do things to hurt ourselves. We don't want God around us because we want to hate. We want to rage and harm against those we hate. We want revenge when another does us wrong or does wrong to someone we love. Even the Psalmist admits to having these feelings and wanting to harm his enemies.

As we read Psalm 139, did you notice the difference in tone in verses 19-22? Before these verses, the tone reveals a warm, intimate, loving relationship with God. God's our buddy. And suddenly the tone changes. The Psalmist seems to be yelling in a rage at God for not getting rid of all the wicked people in the world. If only you would kill them! Get rid of them! I hate them because they hate you! Many times we omit reading these verses because not only are they inconsistent with the rest of the Psalm, but because they are so vile. I am arguing that these verses are the crux of the Psalm. These verses reveal what really lies within the Psalmist's heart. The Psalmist who is bragging that God knows everything about him, suddenly reveals what is really in his heart, hate. He hates all who hate God. He is judging others because he believes they hate God. How does he know what really lies in their hearts? Isn't this God's job to know what lies in another's heart? This mentality of judging gets us into trouble all the time. We judge people by the way they act, the way they drive, the way they dress, the way they talk. We judge another's belief, disbelief, or unbelief. Because "they" are not like us, believe like us, act like us, we become anxious, fearful, and we want God to get rid of them. And when God doesn't, we will make laws and even fight to protect the privileges we claim to exclusively have with God. We make "those people" into our enemies. This is the opposite of how Jesus lived. He reached out to the people others feared and hated. This is the opposite what Jesus preached. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus commanded us to love our enemies and pray for them. Why? "Because God makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous." Or in the words of the Psalmist, God knows everything about everyone. God is with all of us. Nothing tears down the walls of prejudice, nothing turns enemies into friends better than getting to know each other as God knows all of us.

We are as human as the Psalmist. We claim to have this intimate, loving relationship with God, but only God knows what really lies within our hearts. We can be loving one moment, and the next we will spew out the most horrific language against people or do something that exhibits hate to "those people," the same people who God knitted together in their mother's womb, who God also knows intimately. Did you notice the last verses of the Psalm? As the Psalmist is ranting and spewing out his hate for whom he deems as God's enemies, he suddenly realizes what he is saying and catches himself. He begs God to examine his heart. Find all the ways in which I am idolatrous. What are the things that take priority in my life as I ignore you, God? Find the hate within me. Find the ways in which I have been unloving. Examine me. Know me. Remove them. Lead me, Lord, in your everlasting way.

Reflection Questions: How well do you know yourself? God knows you. What is God revealing to you about yourself? What needs to be removed and replaced with the love of God?

Prayer: All-knowing and ever present God, we thank you for making us so wondrously. You know everything about us, but we only want you to know the good in us. Yet, you know the evil that lies within before we will acknowledge it. We try to hide from you our thoughts, our words, our actions that hurt others, the same people you knit together, that you created. Create in us clean hearts, O God. And renew a right spirit within us. Carve out the darkness and perfect us in your love. Help us to know your people the way that you know them. Amen.

