

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Psalm 139:1-18

- 1 *O Lord, you have searched me and known me.*
- 2 *You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.*
- 3 *You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways.*
- 4 *Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely.*
- 5 *You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.*
- 6 *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.*
- 7 *Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?*
- 8 *If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.*
- 9 *If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,*
- 10 *even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.*
- 11 *If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night,"*
- 12 *even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.*
- 13 *For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb.*
- 14 *I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your Works; that I know very well.*
- 15 *My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.*
- 16 *Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed.*
- 17 *How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!*
- 18 *I try to count them—they are more than the sand; I come to the end[a]—I am still with you.*

Have you ever asked yourself how many times you are photographed in a day? When you walk into the bank or return your cart to the corral in the parking lot, somewhere there is a camera marking your every move. Our world is full of blue lights on street corners and buzzing cameras mounted on walls. Yet David tells us here in Psalm 139 that at every moment of the day, we are under a much higher scrutiny. He reveals that the secret to understanding ourselves is to know the God who knows us.

Right at the start, the psalmist proclaims that God has searched him, and God knows him. The Hebrew word for knowing him in this context means that God knows him relationally and experientially. It only makes sense that God knows the psalmist because God created him.

I don't know about you, but for me, thinking about God creating me makes me feel rather special. We're all made differently in our looks and our personalities. We may have similarities, but none of us is exactly the same. Think about how many people there are in the world and add to that all of those who lived before us. God created us to be uniquely different, and God has known those before us, and God knows each and every one of us.

But here in verse 1, the knowing is taken a step further. The psalmist says that God has searched him, meaning God has made a deliberate effort to know him. God's efforts to know the

psalmist here means that God knew what the psalmist was doing and when he was doing it. He knew what the psalmist was thinking and saying. God took the **initiative** to know the psalmist in depth. The same is true for us. God searches and knows us. So, it wasn't enough for God to create us and set us free to live this life that he gave us. God has an emotional connection to us.

In verse 3, the psalmist says that God searches out his path and his lying down, and God is acquainted with all of his ways. The Hebrew word translated "search" in this case has a different meaning than its use in verse 1. Here, it means to measure or to scrutinize. It is more analytical and less emotional than the kind of searching spoken of in the first verse.

God consciously endeavors to know what makes us tick. God has made it his business to know how we feel about things that happen to us. God intentionally seeks to understand why we do and say the things we do and say. Nothing of who we are is hidden from God.

God searches us both ways, not to be a nosey observer, but because he loves us and wants to be intimately involved in our lives. All of God's searching and knowing is not meant to trap or control us, but it's to reassure us, steady us, guide us and strengthen us as we endeavor to face all of life's ups and downs.

The psalmist tells us that God, in fact, knows us better than we know ourselves. Can you imagine that? We should not wonder how this is possible. While we might imagine that no one could possibly know us better than we know ourselves, that is far from true. We are often confused, conflicted and short sighted. We find ourselves doing hateful things—and failing to live according to our treasured values.

Even an insightful human counselor can often see things hidden at our core and then brings them to the surface where we can see them, too. If that is possible, why should we be surprised that the one who created us would know us better than we know ourselves and even better than the best-trained counselor?

In verse 7, we might begin to wonder if the psalmist sees God's presence as a blessing or a curse when he says, "Where could I go from your Spirit? Or where could I flee from your presence?" Surely there are times when we would be embarrassed to think of God watching our every move. We are all sinners, including the psalmist. When we are doing something wrong, we most likely would prefer that God look the other way.

But as we move further along in the psalm, it seems that the psalmist is not intimidated or fearful of God's presence but, instead, finds God's presence comforting. The psalmist recognizes that there are times in our lives that leave us feeling like we are in the darkest and most remote places we can possibly imagine, and yet God is there to comfort, lead and guide us out of the darkness. The frightening darkness loses its power to terrorize us when God is there to sustain us.

On this day of remembrance, I think of this issue of being in the darkness and God's being with us in two ways. First, I think of it for those who have died, as they lived their last moments in this lifetime. I've been by the bedside of many who could no longer communicate with me. They simply worked to take one breath after another. I believe that even in that, what seems to us sitting by the bedside as darkness, there is communication occurring between God and the actively dying.

The communication may not even be happening through words, but instead through the heart and soul's existence in unity with God's Spirit. How comforting that is to me as I know that I will one day go through the unknown of dying. And, it's comforting to know that the one by whom I sit at the bedside of, has One, their Creator, in fact, listening and being with him or her.

Secondly, as one who is left behind to grieve after a loved one passes away, I have someone, a compassionate Friend, to hold me and listen while I sigh and cry with painful feelings too deep to put into words. The darkness of grief cannot, will not, keep God's presence from finding me. Sometimes, that's all we can cling to when it hurts so deeply.

God is there for us because we are precious to God. The psalmist affirms this reality after reflecting on God's presence with us even when we are in dark places. In verse thirteen he says that God was there with me from the very beginning—"For you formed my inmost being. You knit me together in my mother's womb." The Hebrew word for inmost being translated literally means kidney or heart or internal organs.

The psalmist expresses his faith that God designed and brought into being the hidden parts of his body. He affirms that God formed him in his mother's womb, a process that remained invisible to people until the beginning of modern medical imaging.

But the psalmist is speaking of something that surpasses the wonder of the birth process. He knows that the fact that God created the psalmist makes him precious in God's sight. The one who creates always has a special place in his/her heart for that which he/she has created—and so it is with God. The reciprocal is also true. The psalmist acknowledges that God created him, so God has a special place in his heart. The psalmist has turned the corner in recognizing that not only does God know him, but he knows God.

What makes the relationship between the psalmist and God is that God not only created him and knew how he was put together, God knows the psalmist's soul. He knows the psalmist thoughts. Even before the psalmist was born, God knew the path the psalmist's life would take. This does not mean God predestined his days. God just knew before the psalmist did, the decisions the psalmist would make, the challenges he would face, the joys he would celebrate, before the psalmist lived them.

This was almost too much for the psalmist to grasp. As a finite man, the psalmist could not even begin to understand the infinite God. He likens that task to trying to count every grain of sand, which is impossible. But in spite of his personal limitations, we know the psalmist feels strongly the presence of God, a presence that he knows will always be available to him.

What makes the words of this psalm even more amazing is that these truths of God have been meant for all people since the beginning of time. Every single person has been, is, and will be known by God, as a living breathing being, and as soulful, spiritual being. Even though he knows all, he continues to search for everyone, because he wants to be known by us.

Everyone wants to be known, and everyone is known, by God. God knows you better than you know yourself. Think about that. Maybe that scares you, I hope not. To be fully known by God means you always have God's attention. That's pretty special any time, but especially when times are tough.

I remember a moment in my life when I felt very much alone. It was a dark moment in my life when I was trying to make sense of some things that happened to me many years before.

The event I want to tell you about happened one beautiful day when we were on a beach vacation. Our boys were very young. They were jumping the ocean waves while Don and I were sitting in our beach chairs watching them. Zachary came running to us with excitement because he found a seashell while he was in the water. It was beautiful.

I began noticing that others were finding nice-sized shells. For some reason, I felt I needed to find one, too. I walked up and down the edge of the ocean waves looking for a shell. Whenever I thought I saw one coming in with a wave, I ran to that place and reached into the

water, only to find there was no shell. Every day that we went to the beach that week, I went looking for a shell.

I was obsessed with finding a shell. I even began talking to God about it. I felt that if God cared about me, he would give me a shell. I really wanted to know that he cared. I got angry with God. I felt that after all I had been through, the least God could do was give me one lousy seashell. I accused God of not caring as our time at the beach drew to a close.

At the end of our final day at the beach, we gathered our beach chairs, blanket and toys in our arms and began the journey to our car. I turned to take one final look at the ocean. In that moment I was sure I saw a seashell riding a wave to the sand. I dropped everything in my arms and ran to the ocean. I stuck my hand into the murky water where I was sure I saw the shell go under. I pulled my hand out, and there in my hand was a seashell, my own beautiful seashell. In that moment, I knew God understood my pain. I knew God understood. I knew God cared. And that's all I needed to know to continue the journey to a better day.

Oh yes, my friends. God knows you. God knows your joys and your pain. God knows your needs and God cares. God knows. God not only knows. God is with you, for the long haul, on the journey of your life. Amen