

Preacher: Twyla Rowe

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—I am still with you.*

When the 1960s ended, San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district reverted to high rent, and many hippies moved down the coast to Santa Cruz. They had children and got married, too,

though in no particular sequence. But they didn't name their children Melissa or Brett. People in the mountains around Santa Cruz grew accustomed to their children playing Frisbee with little Time Warp or Spring Fever. And eventually Moonbeam, Earth, Love and Precious Promise all ended up in public school. That's when the kindergarten teachers first met Fruit Stand. Every fall, according to tradition, parents bravely apply name tags to their children, kiss them good-bye and send them off to school on the bus. So, it was for Fruit Stand. The teachers thought the boy's name was odd, but they tried to make the best of it.

"Would you like to play with the blocks, Fruit Stand?" they offered. And later, "Fruit Stand, how about a snack?" He accepted hesitantly. By the end of the day, his name didn't seem much odder than Heather's or Sun Ray's. At dismissal time, the teachers led the children out to the buses. "Fruit Stand, do you know which one is your bus?" He didn't answer. That wasn't strange. He hadn't answered them all day. Lots of children are shy on the first day of school. It didn't matter. The teachers had instructed the parents to write the names of their children's bus stops on the reverse side of their name tags. The teacher simply turned over the tag. There, neatly printed, was the word "Anthony."

David tells us here in Psalm 139 that at every moment of the day, we are known intimately. Oh, and God doesn't mess up our names. David goes on to reveal also that the secret to understanding ourselves then, 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. God, the Creator and Ruler of the universe, created you and me. We're all made differently in our looks and our personalities. We may have similarities, but none of us are exactly the same. Think about how many people there are in the world, add to that all of those who lived before us, God created us to be uniquely different, and God has known intimately those who came before us, and God knows each and every one of us in the same way.

But, here in verse one 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, God knew what the psalmist was doing, when he was doing, 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 he gave us. God has an emotional connection to us.

In verse three 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 from its use in verse one. Here it means to measure or to scrutinize. It is more analytical and less emotional than the kind of searching spoken of in verse one.

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. If we are honest with ourselves, we may need to consider that there are things that we don't want to admit about our behaviors, words and thoughts. 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, well trained human counselor can often see things hidden at our core – and bring them to the surface where we can then 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 seven, 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, just like 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.

If I had to guess, the moments that we might think of as the darkest moments are those surrounding death. For me, as I think about this, 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 a person who could no longer communicate with me. They simply worked to take one breath after another. I believe that even in those moments, what seems to us sitting by the bedside, the darkest time of a person's life, 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 who I sit by the bedside of, has One, their Creator, in fact, listening and being with him or her to walk with them to their eternal home.

And then, I also think as one who has been left behind to grieve after a loved one passed away, I realize because of my faith that 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, it 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, "You were 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 now 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, but God also knows the psalmist soul, he knows the psalmist thoughts, God knew even before the psalmist was born, 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.

As I was working with this text, once again, something new occurred to me. I found myself thinking about how another reality about God's knowing makes our relationship with him more intimate; and therefore inspiring, encouraging, comforting, hopeful. I found myself thinking that we as New Testament Christians know how God came to earth through his Son, Jesus Christ. He knows firsthand the joy of birth and taking that first breath. He knows the joy of friendship. As Jesus served his fellow humanity, I can't help but think that God looked into the eyes of individuals through the flesh and blood of a being. God experienced suffering and rejection in a way that should assure us that he knows what it is like to experience pain, emotional and physical.

Then when it came to his only Son's suffering and death on the cross, God could do nothing but watch and grieve. God could have in those moments allowed anger to take over and pour out His fury on all of humanity and we would have been forever lost to our own misery, sin, and hopelessness; but that's not what God did.

Some might think "well, God knew Jesus would rise again, so it was really no big deal for Him. God doesn't really understand our suffering." Okay, So God knew, even Jesus knew there would be resurrection, but that does not eliminate the reality of the suffering and agony both God and God's Son endured. Oh yes, God knows these things that we experience first-hand. And, like the life of Jesus did not end, God has made it so that our lives do not end either. Therefore, we should know that resurrection, life everlasting, is in our future also. God knows personally and he has shown us through Jesus that he knows, even these things that frighten us, and, God has provided assurance and hope for us. Yes, God knows and understands.

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.

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