

Know Me I Pray  
United Church of Broomfield  
January 21, 2024

Psalm 139: 1-6, 13-18 NRSVue

<sup>1</sup> O Lord, you have searched me and known me.

<sup>2</sup> You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
you discern my thoughts from far away.

<sup>3</sup> You search out my path and my lying down  
and are acquainted with all my ways.

<sup>4</sup> Even before a word is on my tongue,  
O Lord, you know it completely.

<sup>5</sup> You hem me in, behind and before,  
and lay your hand upon me.

<sup>6</sup> Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
it is so high that I cannot attain it.

<sup>7</sup> Where can I go from your spirit?  
Or where can I flee from your presence?

<sup>8</sup> If I ascend to heaven, you are there;  
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

<sup>9</sup> If I take the wings of the morning  
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,

<sup>10</sup> even there your hand shall lead me,  
and your right hand shall hold me fast.

<sup>11</sup> If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,  
and night wraps itself around me,"

<sup>12</sup> even the darkness is not dark to you;  
the night is as bright as the day,  
for darkness is as light to you.

<sup>13</sup> For it was you who formed my inward parts;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

<sup>14</sup> I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.  
Wonderful are your works;  
that I know very well.

<sup>15</sup> My frame was not hidden from you,  
when I was being made in secret,  
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

<sup>16</sup> 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.

<sup>17</sup> How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!  
How vast is the sum of them!

<sup>18</sup> I try to count them—they are more than the sand;  
I come to the end—I am still with you.

<sup>19</sup> O that you would kill the wicked, O God,  
and that the bloodthirsty would depart from me—

<sup>20</sup> those who speak of you maliciously

and lift themselves up against you for evil!  
21 Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord?  
And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?  
22 I hate them with perfect hatred;  
I count them my enemies.  
23 Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my thoughts.  
24 See if there is any wicked way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting.

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The author of Psalm 139 is a philosopher who, like Socrates, dares to examine his own inner life. Dare we?

Do we really want God to know *our inner lives*, to know us so completely and intimately? If we're really honest with ourselves I suspect that the answer might be, "I don't know." Speaking for myself, I WANT to have that intimate of a relationship with God, but my heart of heart says I don't know if I can do it. If it's just me and God alone, can I say out loud to God, not just think, but SAY all of my deepest and darkest secrets, thoughts and desires? I believe that God hears and knows my thoughts but it's different than actually saying them out loud. When they're said out loud, thoughts take on life and meaning. They've left your brain so they actually exist.

I think that we see the Psalmist benefits greatly and is an inspiration to all of us to follow and do likewise. The more he probes the labyrinths of his mind, the closer to God, he finds himself. Awesome as the experience is for him, however, it never conjures up fear in him. Instead, it brings him a deep sense of peace. We can overcome doubts and fears if we focus on the joy and peace that such an experience not only offers us but promises us. So, what can we learn from the Psalmist?

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Through his self-study the psalmist has learned that the best of life derives from intimate relations between the creature and the Creator - relations which God initiates in God's own way and God's own time.

Here is no deity high and lifted up; a manufactured image of an old man, white beard, sitting in the clouds. No, here is a God willing to meet us face-to-face. Thus, the philosopher-poet knows him personally. But more important, here is a God who knows him in like manner. So, the psalmist is not one among many, easily lost in the crowd. He is a person in his own right before the Almighty.

Not once does the psalmist feel that the Lord is hemming him in. Rather, he regards God as a welcome Guardian, shielding him from evil while at the same time encouraging him to broaden his perspectives. Thus, he is convinced that it is the Almighty's purpose to provide him security without arbitrarily restraining him. Accordingly, free to do as he will, he is yet never lost to the Lord's supervision.

By night and by day, like a shepherd tending his sheep or a mother hovering over her sleeping babe, the Almighty stands vigilant over the poet. Indeed, so closely does the Lord watch that he is familiar with the author's every move. Let the psalmist lie down, and God sees him do it. Let him arise, and the Eternal is aware of it. He can walk no road but that the Almighty is before and behind him. In fact, he cannot even entertain an idea without God knowing what it is before he can express it. In short, the singer has no doubt that the Lord knows him through and through.

<sup>1</sup> O Lord, you have searched me and known me.

<sup>2</sup> You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
you discern my thoughts from far away.

<sup>3</sup> You search out my path and my lying down  
and are acquainted with all my ways.

<sup>4</sup> Even before a word is on my tongue,  
O Lord, you know it completely.

<sup>5</sup> You hem me in, behind and before,  
and lay your hand upon me.

The very thought of such intimate concern on God's part regarding the daily happenings in the life of one person among many is too wonderful to hold; and, in a burst of gratitude, the psalmist cannot refrain from saying so.

<sup>6</sup> Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
it is so high that I cannot attain it.

But attain that knowledge or not, the singer nonetheless realizes that the Lord's watchfulness over him is not only protective. It is strengthening as well. What a difference it makes in our lives when we know that we never face our decisions or trials alone! Come what may, therefore, be it good or ill the poet can rest assured that God is with him to support or redeem.

<sup>7</sup> Where can I go from your spirit?  
Or where can I flee from your presence?

<sup>8</sup> If I ascend to heaven, you are there;  
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

<sup>9</sup> If I take the wings of the morning  
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,

<sup>10</sup> even there your hand shall lead me,  
and your right hand shall hold me fast.

Just as way leads on to way, so thought leads on to thought; and the philosopher-poet quickly realizes that the Lord's concern for him has always been there. As a matter of fact, it has been there since before he was born. For astonishingly enough, his name was written in God's Book of Life while his body was yet being formed. Hence the miracle of his birth, the psalmist affirms, was no less attended by the Almighty's love than the days he now shares with his divine Companion.

<sup>16</sup> 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.

The psalmist is saying - delicately and in depth - that one need look no farther than one's own body to behold the wonder of God's grace: eyes to see beauty, ears to hear music, hands to fashion art, feet to climb high places, and - above all - minds to think the Lord's thoughts after him. God would hardly be with us prior to our coming into the world, reasons the singer, unless he intends to stay close by us during our sojourn in it.

Given such a concept of the Eternal's lifelong oversight, it is not surprising that the psalmist meditates on the divine goodness day and night. So precious to him are the Lord's concerns, in fact, that he falls asleep each evening musing upon them and greets each dawn reflecting on them.

<sup>17</sup> How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!  
How vast is the sum of them!

<sup>18</sup> I try to count them—they are more than the sand;  
I come to the end—I am still with you.

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The very depth of one's spirituality frequently puts him at odds with those around him of lesser faith. The psalmist's experience is no exception here. For his delight in the Lord is directly challenged by the wicked practices through which many of his neighbors are blatantly defying God. And to the psalmist that means that they are attacking him, so closely does he identify himself with the Almighty.

The psalmist is not primarily concerned about his own feelings. Yes, his neighbors' evil ways are making matters uncomfortable for him; but that is the price of belief. It is rather that God's honor is at stake, and the singer cannot remain silent. For the desecration of the Lord's name must be avenged. So, he petitions the Almighty...

<sup>19</sup> O that you would kill the wicked, O God,  
and that the bloodthirsty would depart from me—  
<sup>20</sup> those who speak of you maliciously  
and lift themselves up against you for evil!

Yet even as the Psalmist's prayer falls from his lips what he hears himself saying startles him. For he suddenly realizes that evil impulses can invade a person's heart - his own included - as stealthily as weeds creep through a garden. Can it be, he asks himself, that this is happening to him? The thought profoundly shakes him, and he cannot rise from his knees until he beseeches the Lord's help in keeping his slate clean.

<sup>23</sup> Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my thoughts.  
<sup>24</sup> See if there is any wicked way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting.

Being in relationship with God is intense, deep and intimate. It isn't necessarily easy and it can be demanding. So, dare we? Dare we go within ourselves to explore our minds, hearts and souls to find what is there; to perhaps see the face of God? Yes, please, dear God, yes. Let us go there. Let us dare to take risks and be vulnerable; to search the Lord for understanding, protection and comfort, just as the Lord is searching us. Yes, the Lord made us, calls us and claims us. God is delving into our minds and hearts continuously, sharing their soul and love, so that we may emulate the Creator. Like the Psalmist, we are philosophers, poets, singers and spiritualists, trying to flourish and bring about the beauty of God through our selves. I dare you to risk everything to experience such indescribable joys that only can be found in relationship with God.

AMEN