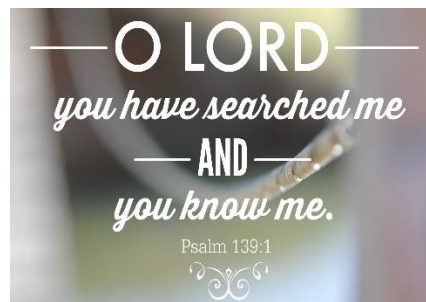


## Seventh Sunday After Pentecost (19 July 2020)

### Lectionary Reading: Psalm 139



So I've made the somewhat brave decision to preach on the lectionary Psalm for today! Psalms are notoriously difficult to preach on, but I just couldn't pass on the opportunity to preach on Psalm 139. This Psalm is one of my favourite Scripture passages, because at its heart it paints a picture of what it means to dare to let God love us, and to strive to love God – the words embody the real journey or adventure of faith – the joy and challenge of it all.

One of the things that makes the psalms such powerful literature is that they are so breathtakingly *contextual*. The psalmists sing out from the mountain tops of human joy (98:1). They cry out from the depths of human despair (130:1). They confess trust of those whose feet are planted on slabs of granite (121). They express the doubts of those who cannot manage to crawl out of bed in the morning (102:6-7; 6:6).

Because every human being either *has been there* or *will be there*--whether the "there" is the depths of the darkest valley or the heights of the mountain top--the contexts of the various psalms are contexts that all people, including ourselves can relate to. And even more, they also offer a glimpse into the songs and prayers that generations, Jesus included, have sung, and prayed.

There are certain Psalms that stand out because of their beautiful words and the depth of their reflection and Psalm 139 is undoubtedly one of them. "Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?" The meaning is profound.

One of the last psalms penned by David this psalm is essentially a prayer for God's help. Unlike a number of the other psalms the writer is so aware of God's enfolding presence that his words are not those of one who fears God, instead they are the words of one who worships and adores God. Being aware of much that is wrong in his world, the psalmist is glad of God's loving

presence, God's purpose, God's care from the day of his birth, and indeed God's presence long beforehand. Equally he is assured that in the future God will guide him on a path towards complete communion with him.

Psalm 139 speaks of God's omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence, that is, God knows everything, is every-where, and is all-powerful – what a thought! It speaks with beauty and power of God's closeness to us. It depicts such an intimate relationship – God knowing our thoughts, our ways, our words, our hearts; that there is no place where we can go and not be held in the love of God. If we long for intimacy with God, these words are inspiration and reassurance.

Psalm 139 has for a long time been a real encouragement for me. I first encountered this psalm as I was just starting to enter the adolescent 'misunderstood territory' at a time when loneliness was probably the bigger emotion. And so, to encounter scripture assuring me that God was interested enough to search me and know me, to carefully knit my body together in the womb making each stitch count, to be acquainted with all my words and my ways and that, I was fearfully and wonderfully made, was a powerful remedy! It struck me – I'm not alone. Here was a God who 'got' me and 'gets' us in a way that nobody else can.

I wonder how often we realise how special we are, just how significant and valuable we are in God's eyes? If you've ever watched the *Antique Roadshow* or *Pawn Stars*, you will know that people bring in objects they think are valuable to have an expert validate their opinion. Sadly, for them, yet entertaining for us, it usually doesn't work that way. What they thought is worth five thousand dollars is worth five hundred. Something that appears incredibly rare is the opposite. And regardless of the owner's hopes, the opinion or the knowledge of the expert determines the value. Does it work that way with people? What gives us value? Is it the opinion of others? Is it our own opinion? How do we know what we're worth?

*Antique Roadshow* and *Pawn Stars* exist because people don't know the value of what they have, they need an expert to tell them. So also, we need an expert to tell us how much we're worth. And we're worth a fortune. Our value is beyond estimate. We are priceless! And how do we know this? Ask the expert – God! Who after all can know this better than the one who has made us.

Psalm 139 is a powerful expression of how much God values his human creation. We can be confident regardless of our circumstances that we are intimately known by God, and that he is directly concerned with and involved

in every minute detail of our lives, more than we can possibly know or understand.

There is certainly a frightening aspect to this truth, but there is also a comfort in it—God is never far from us; we are never out of His thoughts or His care. There is never any kind of situation that slips by Him or that He cannot handle. There is nothing too small or too big for Him—it all matters. He cares about every aspect of life that comes our way—the most trivial and the most wonderful; the joys and the sorrows.

God has woven together every human life and He desires to call all people—including those who are vulnerable and in need—into a loving relationship with Him through Jesus Christ. He has knit us together in our mother's womb, and, remarkably, in that very same way he came to us in His Son Jesus Christ, in human form, given birth by a human mother in a dirty stable. Born into poverty, into a nation of a people oppressed, He died the death of a lowly criminal. These are the lengths that God went to, in order to prove our priceless worth and to show us just how much he cares for all of us. If we weren't important, if we weren't worth anything, Jesus would never have come. God wouldn't have wasted time on worthless things.

So even in the vastness of our universe, in the grandness of our world, among all people and places, we are cherished in such an intimate way because we are valued and significant. And in turn, everyone around us, they are significant as well. When we hear the words of the psalmist today, we are reminded once again of this individual care. As God's creations, we are loved and cherished one by one.

It tells us that God knows us completely and fully, from our strengths to our weakness, and so it reveals that God is in a position to love us perfectly. God can affirm the entire person, because He knows the entire person, and this love is a source of security to us. We do not have to feel threatened by God's presence, but even before we are perfect, we can embrace the merciful love that He has for us, just as the psalmist does.

Where can I go from your spirit, O God? Where can I flee from your presence? "Nowhere," says the psalmist. That is the powerful good news in Psalm 139.

*Let us pray: Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. Amen*