Designed, Known, Loved Peace Presbyterian Church

Psalm 139 First Sunday in the Fall

Elizabeth M. Deibert 8 September 2019

*Mothering Spirit, who hovered over the waters at creation's birth, who descended in the form of a dove at Jesus' baptism, who was poured out under the signs of fire and wind at Pentecost: Come to us, open our hearts and minds, so that we may hear the Word of life in sound and silence and be renewed by your life-giving, nurturing power, for you live and reign with the Father and the Son, now and forever.*

**Psalm 139 (NRSV)**

**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. **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.

Psalm 139 expresses for us the boundless and inescapable love of God. Oh, we can run. We can hide. We can create distance from God, and erect barriers to avoid seeing the wonders that God has intended for us. But God keeps showing up, hoping we will notice. God wants to be in a close relationship with us. That’s why God came to live among us as Jesus Christ. That’s why God gives us the Holy Spirit as our comforter and guide, the one who nudges us in the right direction and fills us with courage to do the right thing.

God created us and we are beautifully designed. When you stand in the shower or in front of the mirror, say to yourself, “I am uniquely designed and wonderfully made.” When you are stumbling through life, falling into holes, literally or figuratively…when you are inserting your foot into your mouth and chewing on it a while, damaging relationships just when you were determined to do better, when you are feeling helpless to make the improvements in your life that you truly desire to make, when you are feeling weak and pretending to be strong, remember that God knows you inside and out. God is with you in the struggle, and God’s voice is not condemning you, but encouraging you in love, reminding you that you are fearfully and wonderfully made. No matter the color of your skin, your gender identity or your sexual orientation. Even with all of your complicating factors -- mental illness, a terminal disease, an addiction, an eating or behavioral disorder, a family history that has left you with shame, hear me now: Whether you feel it or not, YOU are a treasure, a blessing, a valuable human person full of endless potential, able to do even greater works than Jesus, as he promised us in John 14, because Christ returned to his Father with full knowledge of our humanity to your Creator, who calls you beloved. You, no matter how different you are, are created for a purpose.

One way to know your potential and to find healing for your wounds and your griefs and your enormous frustrations with life is to spend more time in prayer and scripture. Another way is to see a counselor or have a Stephen Minister, or even to train in Stephen Ministry. In my years of ministry, I have heard many people say and one of you said to me recently, it is difficult to experience the presence of an invisible God, to believe God is really there for you.

I would add, “without the help of another human being’s loving acceptance.” As someone else recently said, “We all someone to whom we can vent.” As Chip Schaaff used to say, “We have to find a way to stop all our stinking thinking about ourselves.” We need to re-imagine ourselves as God sees us in our best potentiality. I recently spent some time with Melissa Carlson, our Samaritan counselor here at Peace, to work through some frustration, addressing some situations that I felt I had handled poorly. Fierce anger, an inability to watch our words, or profound sadness are helpful warning flags for us that there is more going on under the surface than we think.

Life transitions – moving to a new home, having a child leave home, retiring, having a new baby or being in a new marriage – all of these joyful events can produce stress. I remember when we moved to England with four children and I grieved the support system and pastoral identity that I had left behind, I needed someone besides dear Richard, who was delighted to be in a PhD program and having an adventure, I needed someone else to whom to talk. And I was young enough then to be embarrassed that I had such needs, but there is no shame is seeking out someone to help you listen to your life. I hope you know that we are here for you at Peace – we the staff, we the Stephen Ministers and Samaritan counselor, we the elders and leaders, we the people of the church. We want to be there for you, however imperfectly we might embody the love of God.

When we are able to comprehend and keep ourselves aware of the nearness of God to us at every moment, we are truly blessed. But even if we are unaware, God is still there. Our lack of awareness, the fact that our eyes are closed, does not diminish God’s presence, it only makes it more difficult to see what really is and what matters most. We can cultivate our ability to see God by practicing the presence of God. Faith is a gift, no doubt, but faith is also built upon a life of practicing the disciplines of prayer and meditation, scripture reading and theological contemplation, worship and sacrament, service and generosity. It is the disciplined patterns in our lives that shape us most. Sunday after Sunday reminders. Morning devotion after morning devotion.

And yet we, who are so blessed in many ways privileged, find ourselves making excuses for lack of growth and sometimes berating ourselves for failures, which makes everything even worse.

So no matter what happens – whether life is rolling along smoothly, whether we are struggling with long-term physical, emotional, or mental anguish, whether we had adverse experiences as a child, or as a parent or in a marriage, or at school, we are still the resilient and beloved children of God. God is present with us in our struggle, providing for us, and especially providing for us, through one another as we seek to live out our calling to be Christ to each other. Alone or surrounded by people, sad or glad or mad or bad, we have a loving God who designed us, we have a loving God who knows us, and we have a providing, present God who loves us. No matter how far we run away, God is always following us, even preceding us to our darkest corners, to be our light!

Prayer: Even as we are thinking surely the darkness will cover us, Providing God, we remember that even the darkness is not dark to you, for our darkness is as light to you. For you see us as we truly are – uniquely designed, wonderfully created by you for good works, which you prepared ahead of time to be our way of life.