

Sunday Nov. 29, 2020
 Lesson 13: Created, Loved, Known
 Scripture: Gen. 1: 27, Psalm 139: 13-18

Context:

Our scripture for the final lesson in this series comes from the book of Psalms and a verse from the book of Genesis. The theme for today's lesson is to respond in awe and gratitude to the God who created us and continues to love us. The main focus of these passages is the emphasis on God knowing humanity and creating each individual uniquely.

Of all the psalms, Psalm 139 is the most unique in its exploration of God relating to humanity. It is the most personal expression in scripture of the Old Testament's radical monotheism and nurtures an awareness of the Lord as the total environment of life.¹ There is a radical trust in one God who intimately knows and claims humanity as belonging to God.

Today the psalm is a devotional classic to help individuals reflect upon the awareness of God in this life. There are two major parts of the psalm with today's focus looking at the first part of the psalm. Verses one through eighteen set the psalm up and help us focus today on the awe and grandeur of God.

In the first eighteen verses, there is a specific focus of the psalmist. The psalmist is there to praise God and give an unlimited amount of awe and wonder.² The psalmist names all the ways God knows the psalmist and as a result, the psalmist constantly feels God at work in their life. This allows the psalmist in the remaining verses (nineteen through twenty-four) to flesh out God's presence in the midst of enemies and strife in this life. The constant refrain of God knowing them allows them to process the grief and anger they feel in persecution in times of woe and trouble.

The focus of the psalm is an extremely personal one. Of all the psalms we have in the Bible, this one is perhaps the most vulnerable in terms of the writer feeling secure in their relationship with God. The entire psalm has the cadence of a faith that trusts itself to a being known by the Lord that includes discernment of the self, presence to the self, and creation of the self.³ The psalmist demonstrates a knowledge of intimacy with God, transcending the usual composition of psalms.

What is also very powerful in the psalm is the confidence the psalmist places in God. The psalmist confesses he is never free of God in total existence, but the relationship is neither a prisoner of or mere function of the other.⁴ God is for the psalmist

¹ Mays, James L. "Psalms," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1994), 425.

² Ibid., 425.

³ Ibid., 427.

⁴ Ibid., 427.

even in knowing everything about the psalmist.

Application

The psalms are some of the most beautiful forms of poetry and prayer we have today. The prayers are as modern as they are ancient. The story they tell is about how God is constantly in relationship with humanity, through the good, the bad, and the ugly. God is present in the psalms and reminds people of the intimacy we have with God.

Psalm 139 expresses the beauty of how deeply God knows and loves us. The words in the psalm describe not only an all-knowing God as they also describe a relational God who loves humanity even in the chaos of life. God created all of humanity and knows every hair on our head and every blemish on our body. And God is to be praised for the handiwork done. God deserves praise for the beauty found within humanity and creation.

Perhaps one of the most beautiful aspects of this psalm is how the body is presented in the text. Sometimes the Christian tradition avoids talking about the body because of the messiness that is associated with the body whether it is carnal relations or dealing with the inevitable nature of mortality. The body is sometimes avoided in Christian discussion or teaching order to make things “spiritual,” “mental,” or “emotional.” To not address those impulses or the things of a bodily nature seem like the easier route than celebrating the human body.

Yet here we hear of how God knows all about the skin that will age or the power of human touch. God delights in the design of the human body and has created us to marvel in how we have been created. Of course, there are to be boundaries and we are not to abuse what God has created. However, God wants us to celebrate the bodies we’ve been given and to delight how God has made each one of us, blemishes and all.

We also hear the vastness of this psalm as the psalmist is aware of the mighty nature of God and how God is so powerful, knowing every detail of the human including their thoughts and mannerisms. And yet God is still with them, loving them and claiming them as God’s own. This vast God who has more thoughts than the grains of sands, thinks the earth needed this one psalmist to be who they are and God will walk with them.

This psalm gives comfort to us as we think of how God knows us with our strengths and growing edges and still claims us. God is with us from birth to death and is with us in the in-between. Our God is always at work on us and reveals new things to us everyday.

Two weeks ago, this psalm came to the top of my mind as I helped to preside over the baptism of my second nephew at a beautiful outdoor service at one of my father’s former appointments. As I poured upon the water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, I looked into his eyes as he swapped from cries to coos. After the baptism, I proceeded to present him to the congregation from the outside steps with him smiling and staring at me with his biggest grin. The Lord was upon him as the waters of baptism covered him and the good people of First United Methodist Church Tallassee welcomed him to the community of faith.

Yet the experience didn’t come full circle for me until I began the drive home. As I drove, I was moved by tears in my eyes. I reflected upon my nephew’s eyes during the baptism and thought of how they reminded me of my father’s eyes as I drove upon the

same stretch of road where he died in a car accident several years ago. The words of the service of death and resurrection struck me: “Dying, Christ destroyed our death. Rising, Christ restored our life. Christ will come again in glory. As in baptism NAME put on Christ, so in Christ may NAME be clothed with glory.” For me, it was a holy moment as I thought of both the beauty and frailty of life.

Full circle, God is with us from birth to death. From joy to sorrow to anger to indifference, God is there for us and gives us strength along the way. God knows us, claims us, and loves us.

What do you love about your body? Why do you think God wants us to celebrate the bodies we’ve been given? When have you had holy moments where you realized God was holding you in both joy and in pain? How will you give thanks to God for this one precious life you’ve been given?

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