

Psalm 139:1-18 August 18th, 2013 “Still with you”

Maybe before the service you glanced ahead in the folder, noticing: the focus for our service is Psalm 139. If you read into the Psalm, I'd be interested to hear what you felt at different points in the verses. Let's hear it together now: **Read Psalm 139:1-18.**

For the director of music. Of David. A psalm. 1 O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. 2 You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. 3 You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. 4 Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD. 5 You hem me in--behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. 7 Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? 8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. 9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, 10 even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. 11 If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," 12 even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you. 13 For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. 14 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. 15 My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, 16 your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. 17 How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! 18 Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you.

A mix of emotions stirs inside me as I hear the words of Psalm 139. Among them ... here I come face-to-face with a truth of the Almighty that's pretty intimidating. He knows everything about me. He knows what I've done. I honestly have a gut reaction: Fear. I want to run, I want to hide. But there's nowhere I can go. I can't escape the truth. He knows when I've done something wrong, even when I hide it from everyone else. But more than that. His knowledge of me goes even deeper, searching and knowing my every thought. He knows the times the right words have come from my mouth, while ugly thoughts festered in my head. The truth is there's no place - no time - I escape the Lord's watch or reach. A part of me calls out: run for the hills – you certainly deserve only God's wrath and punishment!

I'm tempted to think: "Maybe I can do something to patch up my relationship with God. I've done a pretty good job piecing together some obedience to the commandments." But the truth hits me again: "I can't hide the ways ~ past and present ~ I've failed. There's nothing I can do!" If I challenge the Lord's fairness in this ~ God identifies it as idolatry ~ because I'm placing my way/my opinions/my thoughts above his.

But... what did God do? In spite of all my sin...

- The Bible tells us what the Lord did in answer. The power of the Most High overshadowed a young woman named Mary. The Holy Spirit conceived in her the very Son of God. And over the next 40 weeks, Jesus Christ was knit together in a mother's womb. A virgin gave birth to a child. The eternal Son of God became part of our human family – our brother – He was made like us in every way, but was without sin.

- And then, God passed through every stage of life. God spent months being carried from place to place. God spent years toddling along at his parent's heels. God the Son felt the tiredness that comes with growing, learning, working in this world. Hey, kids, God even experienced the pain that comes from bangs & bruises & scrapes & cuts. Even more: God experienced the pain that comes from bullies and mockery. But he never shot back a hateful comment – he never retaliated by bullying back. He never ran and hid from the work he came to do. He obeyed his own law to love perfectly.
- Then knowing everything that awaited him, Jesus – God in the flesh – willingly went to the death we deserved. Every single one of our sins he knew in the most intimate way – for he took all sin upon himself, feeling the wrath of God over every one. Yes, God – God the Son – suffered our consequence of hell as he hung on the cross

Why? So He could reclaim us. David, in Psalm 139, so eloquently makes the case for our God's first claim to us: *"you created my inmost being – you knit me together – you wove the fabric that is my being into what can only be described as 'me.'"*

David also had the confidence to conclude Psalm 139 saying: *"Search me, O God, and know my heart... See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting"* (vs.23-24). Understand please: that's not self-reliance on David's part showing up in the end. David spoke in the humility expressed when He prayed in another Psalm (51): *"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. Cleanse me and I will be clean. Create in me a pure heart, O God."*

In our worship service today, we pray with David. David lived about 1,000 B.C. But he trusted in the same message as Christians today. We approach God in the same humility. The Lord has brought us to the same confession – the same faith. We all lost ourselves in sin, and were headed to hell. But our God gave us this promise & in time fulfilled it: "Christ bore our sins in his body on the tree... by his wounds you have been healed" (1 Peter 2:24). And God called us to trust in him. And so... we're comforted that the Lord knows our hearts. He has said: everyone who trusts in Christ alone is on the Way to life everlasting.

The Lord has brought us to know: we are not trying to escape the grasp of an angry judge. There is no reason to run and hide from God. Instead, we come to our God, confessing we have nothing good to offer him. We turn to him for his mercy and fall into his forgiving arms in Christ.

Then this news of his "hemming" us in is: the news of his love surrounding us as we journey through life. That view dominates our look at these descriptions of the Lord in Psalm 139. His following behind you, and his going before you, his hand holding you? What a comfort! Every time you awake, he is still with you. Hallelujah! The Lord does know everything about you, and ... he has saved you. He has made you his dear child through faith in Jesus. That makes all the difference! So we eagerly look to the words of Psalm 139, and our souls are revived – the Lord brings us comfort and joy and peace! And he brings forth praise from our lips!

Part 2 - Psalm 139:1-18 *delivered later in the service* **“Still with you”**

13 For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. 14 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. 15 My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, 16 your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. 17 How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! 18 Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you.

We have never been so “connected,” as we are in our high-tech world. Texting, IM, Facetime, Skype, Facebook. And yet statistics point to the cold truth: people have never felt so lonely.

- NY Times article cited: One in three Americans over 45 identifies as chronically lonely, up from just one in five a decade ago. . . the number of lonely Americans will surely spike.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/19/opinion/sunday/douthat-loneliness-and-suicide.html>

Why? I'm sure we could talk about facets of that for hours. But here's one part of the picture...

Do you often get bombarded with the message: “You're not worth my time or attention”? Maybe people won't say those exact words, but you get the message: “I'm not really interested in you, unless... you look really good. . . you have the kind of stuff I like. . . you're popular. . . you're able to help me in some way.”

People's attention and acceptance of us is often conditional. Think how often – and in what ways – you have experienced this: Kids in the classrooms. . . Messages from TV/movies/magazines. . . dealing with the dating scene. . . the workplace. . . etc.

How do we combat the messages that slowly chip away at us, leaving us hurting? Look to God's truth and encouragement.

The truth of the matter is: you are important to God. Psalm 139 reminds us of this in the most powerful & personal of terms. The same One who called the stars into existence, cares about you. . . loves you. And the Lord's attentiveness to you is a “world apart” – so far above what is offered by people of the world.

- You're not insignificant, as you might sometimes feel based on the way people treat you. You're more than just a number – the Lord doesn't track and remember you by a student ID number, or account number or insurance policy number. You're not a mere blob moving around the face of the earth.
- You are blood-bought. Jesus, God the Son, spent his life for you. You mean that much to God! You have been gifted faith in Jesus by the working of God the Holy Spirit. You mean that much to God!
- And God's attention goes all the way back in your life to when: he knitted you together – unique – no two of you alike... not mass-produced, like items rolling off a production line. God the Father has that much personalized, intimate interest in you! The minutest detail of your being did not escape the attention of the Lord, who shaped and fashioned you - every inch of you carefully woven.

God was there from day 1... He knew about you before your parents did. God has been with you on your whole journey through life. He doesn't just know a general accounting of your day. He knows the exact second your eyes opened this morning. The precise moment you leave your home for work each day, he

is there. Kids, He'll be walking the halls with you in your new school year. He knows every time your address has changed, and He has moved there right with you. He knows every hurt you have experienced, every pain you've felt. He knows every whispered anguish of your heart. He knows you so thoroughly. Isn't that a comfort?

In a world so cold, where people are so unforgiving toward those who don't stack up to their expectations... in a world where people seem to pounce on your every flaw... in a world that can leave you so hurting, lonely, wondering about your standing or worth...

The Lord doesn't leave you guessing about your worth to him. He doesn't leave you wondering if you're alone in the world. He doesn't leave you hurting or uncertain of where you stand with him. He tells you in crystal clear words how he feels about you: it's all in his letter to you - the Bible. And he doesn't just tell you, he backs up His Word with action.

Instead of conditional, the attention and love he gives you is unconditional. "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10). Kids, you remember that passage from our soccer nights? Instead of giving you "no time of day," he gives you attention at all times of the day – every day. He is intimately involved in every moment of your life:

9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, 10 even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

Our God will stay with you, even in the darkness of a debilitating disease. Even if the darkness you face is a place no one who loves you can reach you: the darkness of a prison, in a land an ocean apart, here is your God's Word to you.

12 even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you. ... 18 ... When I awake, I am still with you.

Wherever you are, the Lord will be with you. In the darkest, or most difficult, or the loneliest, or the most pain-filled places of the world, the Lord - still with you – for he is always with his people.

Trust and Thank God. Praise him for his goodness to you. Treasure his truth. Your God knows you – He is here for you – He loves you – He cares for you. And He will never leave you nor forsake you.

- And that includes the "dark hour" of death. For death for a believer in Christ is the gateway to life in Heaven!
- Friends, the only way you or I can lose out on this comfort is if we leave him - if we reject him.

The news today complements the news we heard at our soccer nights these past weeks (we'll hear one more of those messages to kick off our picnic): there are many blessings that are ours only in Christ alone! May our Lord lead each one of us in that way everlasting!