

God Knows You

Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18
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First Presbyterian Church
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The wise rabbis of long ago used to tell the story of a child who tried to flee from God – specifically, he refused to study the Talmud – the first 5 books of the Bible and the religious teachings. In desperation, his parents called in their rabbi.

The day the rabbi was to come, the child cowered in terror. Then, he heard the heavy boots on the stairs leading to their apartment. As the parents opened the door, a voice roared, “Where is the boy who refuses to study Talmud?”

The parents themselves were a little shaken and intimidated. The rabbi ordered them out of the apartment.

The huge, bearded man loomed over the shivering child. Then, he picked up the boy, sat down in a chair, and gently folded the child to his chest. The boy’s terror gave way to a feeling of peace. In time, the child’s own heartbeat matched the rabbi’s.

After about an hour – one of the most peaceful hours the boy had ever known – the parents knocked on the door of their own apartment. The rabbi set the child down, looked into his eyes, and winking.

Then he stomped over to the door, violently pulled it open, and yelled, “Now the child will study Talmud!” And he did. In time, he became a famous rabbi himself.

One day, his own students asked him how he had come to love the Talmud so much. It was then that he told them of the day when the rabbi had picked him up and held him close to his heart.

In today’s Old Testament lesson, the psalmist – presumably King David – had been running away from God, perhaps after having an affair with Bathsheba, who was married to someone else. And in his running away, David comes to realize there is no escaping God.

We’ve all spent time running away from God at one point or another. Whether you realize it or not, whenever you did something you regretted and then failed to place yourself under the judgement of the Lord, you were running away from God.

Whenever you pursued something apart from God – a personal goal that is all about you and your wants and desires, a temptation that calls to you that you just can’t resist, a pattern of anger and outbursts that you’re not dealing with, a responsibility or calling that you stick with but only half-heartedly – these are all ways that we run away from God every day.

Well, when it comes to running away from God, I've got some good news and some bad news for you. Which would you like to hear first – the good news or the bad?

OK, well, the _____ news is that there is no running away from God. And the _____ news is that there is no running away from God.

This is what David found and expressed so well in the Psalm we're looking at today. The first thing David does is come to realize that he can't hide anything from God.

"O Lord, you have searched me and known me," he says. "You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely."

If that is true of David, and you, and me, how does that make you feel – knowing that God knows your every thought, every word that's about to come out of your mouth? Pretty weighty, isn't it? So weighty, says David, that he can't even imagine it.

Not only does God know all David's thoughts, but he knows every step David takes, everyplace he goes and where that leads him. Or as David says, "You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. ... You hem me in behind and before and lay your hand upon me."

How does it make you feel knowing that God watches your every step and knows exactly where that will lead you? It's a pretty vulnerable position to be in, isn't it – having someone know everything about you? I don't know about you, but for me, that's kind of disconcerting.

Everyone likes to think that they can have private thoughts, some time alone to themselves, somewhere they can go to get away from everyone and everything. It's just not so; God is always watching, and God sees all.

Not only that, but God knows everything about you. He knows every inch of your body. He knows what you looked like as a kid and what you look like now. He knows all the stupid stuff you did in the past and all the sneaky stuff you do today.

"For," as David says, "it was you, (O God), who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb.... My frame (is) not hidden from you.... Your eyes beheld my unformed substance, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

Fearfully and wonderfully made. That's a good way to think about it – how wonderful it is to have someone know you so well, and yet how frightening it is at the same time, realizing that someone knows everything about you – past, present and future.

One day in court, a small-town prosecutor called his first witness to the stand – a grandmotherly, elderly woman. He approached her and asked, "Mrs. Jones, do you know me?"

She responded, "Why, yes, I do know you, Mr. Williams. I've known you since you were a young boy. And frankly, you've been a big disappointment to me. You lie, you cheat on your wife, you manipulate people and talk about them behind their backs. You think you're a rising big shot when you haven't the brains to realize you never will amount to anything more than a two-bit paper pusher. Yes, I know you."

The lawyer was stunned. Not knowing what else to do he pointed across the room and asked, "Mrs. Jones, do you know the defense attorney?"

She again replied, "Why, yes, I do. I've known Mr. Bradley since he was a youngster, too. I used to baby-sit him.... And he, too, has been a real disappointment to me. He's lazy, bigoted and has a drinking problem. The man can't build a normal relationship with anyone and his law practice is one of the shoddiest in the entire state. Yes, I know him."

At his point, the judge rapped the courtroom to silence. He called both counselors to the bench and said in a very quiet voice, "If either of you asks her if she knows me, you'll be jailed for contempt!"

It's wonderful to have someone know you so well, and yet it's also a little frightening, realizing that someone knows all the good and the bad about you, that nothing and I mean nothing is hidden.

That's what it's like with God. Nothing is hidden. God knows everything about you. He's watching you right now, in fact. And he knows how you feel about that.

The only way to take comfort in this, the only way to be at peace with this is to know – and trust – that as much as God knows you, that's how much God loves you. And not only that, God has always known what your life would be like.

God knew you would disappoint him. God knew you would fail at key moments in life. God knew you would get sidetracked and take the wrong turn. And God knows where all that is getting you.

As David said of God, "In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed." In trying to wrap his brain around this, David comes to one, ultimate conclusion. "I come to the end," says David, "I am still with you."

David comes to know what God has always known – that where we end up in life is with God, cradled in the arms of God.

You are loved by God, warts and all. You are embraced by God, no matter how far you've gone astray. No matter what the future holds for you, what tomorrow brings, you are destined to be with God – and in that, to know and share in the victory and glory of the Lord. And that, my friends, is the good news. Amen

PASTORAL PRAYER

Gracious Creator, you have made us for yourself, and, before we draw our first breath, you know us and have called us by name.

What a glorious and freeing thought, and, for some of us, perhaps a little frightening as well.

We are afraid of being vulnerable, yet your intimate knowledge of us becomes an invitation to come as we are, without pretense or posturing, without defensiveness, without cover-up.

In your warm embrace we are safe and cherished. We can rest trusting that your grace – rather than our striving – will secure this day and our future.

We pray for those facing difficult and uncertain times, knowing all-too-well the future is in your hands. We pray for those recovering from illness and injury. We pray for those who grieve, and for those who are nearing the end of life. Send to them your Spirit of peace and comfort.

We pray all this in the name and power of our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ, who gave to us the Lord's Prayer, a prayer we join in now raising our eyes to heaven and our voices in song:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.