

- 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 night wraps itself around me,"
- 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.

Response to the Word

L: This is the Word of God for the people of God.

P: Thanks be to God!

Psalm 139:1-18, 23-24

06/02/2024 – Saginaw First U.M.C.

"Courageous Living"

Rev. Amy Terhune

As we continue through this season of Pentecost, the scriptures point our focus towards the awesomeness of God. We saw it last week in Isaiah's encounter with God, and the hemorrhaging woman's encounter, as well. We see it this week in David's incredible Psalm. Lord, you've searched me and known me. You know everything about me because you created me. You know my sins. You know my potential. I can't escape your presence – you never leave me. David is one of the most human figures in the Bible—capable of great sin and great devotion. This psalm is a prayer, written while David is in hiding, in fear for his life. His enemies are working against him. Injustice appears to be winning in the ranks of government. And I think he's a little conflicted. He wants the corruption punished, but he also wants a kinder and holier world. And so he prays one of the most courageous prayers you'll find anywhere in scripture: search me, test me, lead me.

The reason I call that prayer courageous is because it's a prayer for self-knowledge. What David really wants and needs is the fortitude to be who he's called by God to be in this world. As we

celebrate with our graduates today, I lift this prayer of David because we need courageous men and women of faith in our world today – people willing to know themselves and to respond to God’s Spirit at work both within them and within the systems and the peoples of our world. The challenge is that the calling God places on our lives when we’re 20 years old may evolve and change. It may change by the time we’re forty, sixty, eighty. Which means that self-discovery and faithful devotion are not journeys that we ever achieve and finish. They are ongoing disciplines throughout life.

Marianne Williamson, in her book *Reflections on Love*, writes powerful words that challenge us in the search to know ourselves and God: “Our deepest fear,” she says, “is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, 'Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?' Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.” [from Marianne Williamson, [A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of "A Course in Miracles"](#).]

When David prays that God will search him, the prayer is deeper than a surface glance can reveal. The word “search” carries two powerful connotations rolled all into one. The first connotation of search refers to searching the earth by boring or digging, as in the search for minerals, metals, or water for a well. God has dug into us. He knows every cell in our bodies, every fiber of our being, the number of hairs on our head. And even more, he knows the content of our hearts and minds, he knows our thoughts and our ways. Now that can be a little disconcerting. Is there anyone who feels no shame about the thoughts that have crossed our minds or the things we may have done when no one was around to find out?

“Perhaps some of you’ve heard about the small-town prosecuting attorney who was trying a case. He called as his first witness an elderly woman who had lived in this town all of her life, and happened to be the nosiest gossip around. He approached her and said, "Mrs. Jones, do you know me?"

“She said, "Why yes, I know you Mr. Williams. I've known you since you were a young boy." He smiled until she said, "And frankly, you've been a big disappointment to me. You lie, you cheat on your wife, you manipulate people, you talk about them behind their backs, you charge far too much money, and you don't have the brains to realize you're never going to amount to anything more than a two-bit paper pusher. Yes, I know you."

“Well, this lawyer was stunned. Not knowing what else to do, he pointed across the room and said, "Mrs. Jones, do you know the Defense Attorney?"

“She said, "Why yes, I do. I've known Mr. Smith since he was a youngster as well, and he’s also a disappointment to me. He's lazy, he has a drinking problem, he cheated his way through law school, he can't find any woman that will marry him because he loathes himself, and he's one of the most crooked lawyers in this state. Yes, I know him."

“Well, at this point the judge's gavel came down with a thunderous boom, and he said, "Silence! I want both counsels to approach the bench." When they got there, the judge informed them both in a very quiet voice but with fire in his eyes, "if either one of you ask her if she knows me, I'll jail you both for contempt of court." [5 ¶s from “Our God Is an Awesome God” by James Merritt, [www.Sermons.com](#).] There isn’t a single one of us who would want our entire lives laid out before a room full of witnesses. If this makes you squirm a bit in your seat, maybe there’s something you need to work out with God. The good news is that God is far more forgiving than any court judge, and far more ready to help us identify

and root out the sin and unhealthy parts of us deep inside. And thankfully, God is not like that nosy old gossip. He does indeed know the worst about us—our failures, our weaknesses, our sin. But keep in mind that God sees the best about us as well. God knows our dreams, our best intentions, our gifts.

The second connotation of search suggests that God has searched as in scanning the landscape—he has searched us out. In seminary, my professor reminded us that Scripture is not the story of our search for God, but rather, the story of God’s search for us. Remember the three parables of Luke 15, where Jesus talks about the lost coin, the lost sheep, and the prodigal son? In each of those parables, the point is that God cares about the lost, that God will expend huge amounts of energy on behalf of the lost, that God will search for us until he finds us. None of us gets through life without feeling lost sometimes. As our graduates begin a new season in their lives, I remind us all that seasons come and seasons go. When we feel lost, that, too, is just a season. God is still here, still guiding, still searching us out. Our faith teaches us how to weather seasons of doubt, of lostness, of grief, of failure. Our faith helps us see beyond, trusting that God has plans for us we don’t yet know.

Friends, God’s love for us is deep and profound, completely unmerited and unfathomable. But God also has expectations of us. God wants us to love and be loved. We cannot separate His love for us from His desire for our lives. His love IS His call and claim upon us—His love is what sustains and drives his hopes for us—his hopes that we would find fulfillment, integrity, purpose, and inner peace. His hopes that we would see beyond our fears and stretch our growing edges in ways that give God’s grace room to anchor our life in God’s calling.

In order to understand that even better, take a look at Jesus—God made flesh—one who was tempted in every way that we are and yet did not give in to sin. This same Jesus could look at a woman who was a prostitute and not turn away despite what she obviously did in private. This same Jesus could look upon a crowd and have pity on them, even though that crowd was calling out for his death. That same Jesus could offer paradise to a crook even as life was leaving his body. Jesus knew then, as He knows now, about all of our secret little sins and sicknesses, and yet, he doesn’t turn his back on us. Nor does He seek to scandalize us by putting our pixelated faces on national TV in the name of entertainment. For Jesus—God made flesh—knowing what we do in secret drew out his compassion for us. But he never failed to see our humanity, our best selves, the vital life in us that is created in God’s image. So pray courageously to be searched, tested, and known. Live courageously. Love courageously. And change the world as only you can!

O Lord, search me and know me,
heal me and grow me,
challenge me and show me
how to be your light,
your love,
your body
in the world beyond myself.
Amen.