

## KNOWN & LOVED FULLY

7/19/20 ~ St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Encinitas, CA (*Livestreamed*)

Proper 11 (A): Genesis 28:10-19a; Psalm 139: 1-11, 22-23; ~~Romans 8:12-25~~; Matt 13:24-30,36-43

Recently, one of my out-of-town friends told me she has a "Pandemic Boyfriend!" It's long-distance, but still...doesn't that sound exciting? They're having a great time getting to know each other through phone calls and texts.

In those first weeks and months of a relationship—it's such a wonderful time, isn't it? When someone is fully paying attention to you—wanting to know every last detail of your entire life. That's intimacy—being fully known.

This wanting to be completely known is not an ego-based desire. It's about a need to have someone else know who we are at our deepest core, so that we can test out if we're really lovable. What we're exploring, in a very subliminal way, is: "if you know everything about me, will you still love me?"

That's what this morning's Psalm is all about. But this kind of being known, is the ultimate intimacy. Psalm 139 describes intimacy with God. I like to read this Psalm when I need a spiritual lift in life; I find it helpful to read Psalm 139 to people in the midst struggle; and it's a great Psalm to share with someone trying to fathom the depth and breadth of God's love.

That's exactly what the Psalms were created for: to lament, to praise God, and to offer gratitude. The Psalms were written as poetic prayers meant to be sung. Early scripture studies attributed the authorship of the entire Book of Psalms to David, but later scholarship indicates that they were written and collected over a span of five centuries, many of the authors paying homage to David.

In ancient temple worship—both in the Judeo pre-Christian world, and early Christian times, these Psalms would have been chanted, or sung, on a regular basis. People would have been as familiar with Psalm 139 as we are with Amazing Grace. Wouldn't that be comforting to sing the words of this Psalm to a tune that would play over and over in your mind? "You have searched me out and known me; you know my sitting down and my rising up."

Well, I don't have a pandemic boyfriend, but I have started a new spiritual practice during quarantine that's been very exciting to me. Each morning I sit in front of a little altar in my bedroom, and focus on God through Centering Prayer. One of the items on my altar is the icon; shown on the cover of today's bulletin. The image is Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Looking at it the other day, I realized it's the perfect image for this Psalm: "Darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day; darkness and light to you are both alike." That beautiful imagery of the Psalm conveys so much: "you know my sitting down and my rising up;" reminding us that there is nowhere we can go to escape God.

We can ignore God; we can pretend that God is ignoring us, but after we're done with our internal shenanigans, we realize: "If I climb up to heaven, you are there; if I make the grave my bed, you are there also. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand will lead me and your right hand hold me fast."

Last weekend I officiated a wedding (just to be clear...it was outdoors, we were distanced and we wore face-coverings). As I always do in a marriage homily, I talked about the difference between a contract and a covenant. A contract is a legally binding document meant to offer a clear way out for either person signing it, should the other party fail to keep their end of the bargain. A covenant, on the other hand, is a promise made to stay in the partnership no matter what.

Inherent in that promise is the understanding that we will mess up; we will have problems. But instead of opting out, we will ask for forgiveness, seek repentance, and strive for reconciliation. That is the kind of relationship God offers to us, and so a couple offers it to each other in marriage—unconditional love.

Psalm 139 describes that in more detail: “Search me out, O God, and know my heart.” In a covenant, we love and are loved through it all. The Psalmist, points out the challenge of accepting the vastness of God’s love, saying: “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain to it.”

And it can feel selfish to simply focus on God’s loving embrace, when we’re in the midst of such challenging times. But I’m not suggesting we look away from the needs of our neighbors; and we can’t stop talking about, and striving toward, racial equality. But we have to do self-care so that we can carry on.

I invite you to enter into this Psalm with that in mind. You might want to print out a copy to put on your fridge; save a photo of it on your iPhone; or memorize a line or two of it. Most of us haven’t been on a plane in several months, but we all know the drill. If something happens, you put on your oxygen mask first so that you’re better able to help someone else.

Let Psalm 139 be your spiritual oxygen mask. Let the words embrace you fully, and breathe the truth of it in deeply: you are a beloved child of God. God knows you completely; and God loves you deeply.

-AMEN

**Psalm 139: 1-11, 22-23**

- 1 LORD, you have searched me out and known me; \*  
you know my sitting down and my rising up;  
you discern my thoughts from afar.
- 2 You trace my journeys and my resting-places \*  
and are acquainted with all my ways.
- 3 Indeed, there is not a word on my lips, \*  
but you, O LORD, know it altogether.
- 4 You press upon me behind and before \*  
and lay your hand upon me.
- 5 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; \*  
it is so high that I cannot attain to it.
- 6 Where can I go then from your Spirit? \*  
where can I flee from your presence?
- 7 If I climb up to heaven, you are there; \*  
if I make the grave my bed, you are there also.
- 8 If I take the wings of the morning \*  
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
- 9 Even there your hand will lead me \*  
and your right hand hold me fast.
- 10 If I say, "Surely the darkness will cover me, \*  
and the light around me turn to night,"
- 11 Darkness is not dark to you;  
the night is as bright as the day; \*  
darkness and light to you are both alike.
- 22 Search me out, O God, and know my heart; \*  
try me and know my restless thoughts.
- 23 Look well whether there be any wickedness in me \*  
and lead me in the way that is everlasting.