

**“The Wings of the Morning”
Psalm 139
Pollocksville Presbyterian Church
Sermon #62
7th Sunday After Pentecost
18th Sunday in the COVID-19 Pandemic
7.19.20**

Psalm 139

For the music leader. Of David. A song.

Lord, you have examined me.

You know me.

2

You know when I sit down and when I stand up.

Even from far away, you comprehend my plans.

3

You study my traveling and resting.

You are thoroughly familiar with all my ways.

4

There isn't a word on my tongue, Lord,

that you don't already know completely.

5

You surround me—front and back.

You put your hand on me.

6

That kind of knowledge is too much for me;

it's so high above me that I can't reach it.

7

Where could I go to get away from your spirit?

Where could I go to escape your presence?

8

If I went up to heaven, you would be there.

If I went down to the grave, you would be there too!

9

If I could fly on the wings of dawn,

stopping to rest only on the far side of the ocean—

10

even there your hand would guide me;

even there your strong hand would hold me tight!

11

If I said, “The darkness will definitely hide me;
the light will become night around me,”

12

even then the darkness isn’t too dark for you!

Nighttime would shine bright as day,

because darkness is the same as light to you!

13

You are the one who created my innermost parts;

you knit me together while I was still in my mother’s
womb.

14

I give thanks to you that I was marvelously set apart.

Your works are wonderful—I know that very well.

15

My bones weren’t hidden from you

when I was being put together in a secret place,

when I was being woven together in the deep parts of
the earth.

16

Your eyes saw my embryo,

and on your scroll every day was written that was
being formed for me,

before any one of them had yet happened.

17

God, your plans are incomprehensible to me!

Their total number is countless!

18

If I tried to count them—they outnumber grains of sand!

If I came to the very end—I'd still be with you.

19

If only, God, you would kill the wicked!

If only murderers would get away from me—

20

the people who talk about you, but only for wicked
schemes;

the people who are your enemies,

who use your name as if it were of no significance.

21

Don't I hate everyone who hates you?

Don't I despise those who attack you?

22

Yes, I hate them—through and through!

They've become my enemies too.

23

Examine me, God! Look at my heart!

Put me to the test! Know my anxious thoughts!

24

Look to see if there is any idolatrous way in me,

then lead me on the eternal path!

The Word of the LORD. **Thanks be to God!**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Out of curiosity, for those who are familiar with Psalm 139, how many of you dwell on verses 19-22? You know, the ones that seem so out of place when compared to the other 20 verses:

If only, God, you would kill the wicked!

If only murderers would get away from me...

Honestly, I didn't really know these verses existed until 3 years ago.

Yes, I've sung anthems and hymns based on this psalm, but it just

seems disjointed when compared to what else there is in this psalm. Of course, we focus on other parts of this beloved psalm. “Lord, you have examined me.” “Where could I go to get away from your spirit?” “You are the one who created my innermost parts...”

I could go on because there is so much to love about this psalm! It is an intimate psalm. There is no escaping God’s watchful eye who not only looks out for us, but looks through us. And no matter what we do, we can’t escape God’s caring hands.

Psalms 139, presumably written by David, teaches us that human existence is complex. On one hand, we praise God, as we read in verses 1-18. They function as words of praise. On the other hand,

we are prone to wickedness as seen in the final verses and they end on a petition to God to judge our hearts AND provide healing for the sins we have committed.

It's in the first 18 verses that we tend to focus on this psalm. For many of us listening to this sermon, we are steeped in the Reformed tradition and Psalm 139 resonates with many of us as it points to a universal and all-knowing God who knew us before time began. Of course the LORD examines our hearts. Of course God knows when we rise and stand. Of course God studies our every movement. Of course God knows us better than we know ourselves. That's a big part of our theology as members of the Reformed branch of Christianity. And I find a lot of comfort in it.

There is nowhere we can hide! The LORD chases after us even when we *think* we are eluding the Maker of Heaven and Earth. In heaven, God is there. In death, God is there. If we could fly on the wings of the morning, God's right there. If we hide out in some remote part of the Outer Banks of North Carolina in complete darkness with no one around, God is still going to be right there. The complete darkness is not too dark for God because night and light are the same to the LORD.

And God examines our hearts. Before we've spoken our first word of the day, God knows exactly what we're going to say. God's

presence follows us every day probing us and keeping us on the straight and narrow path.

But, what do we do with those words starting in verse 19? We can't simply ignore them. If we're looking to the Book of Psalms to sugarcoat the human experience, we need to go somewhere else.

Psalms 139 isn't the first psalm to reference the elimination of the wicked. Just go to Psalm 104:35. Of course, this is not the first psalm that declares trust in God in the midst of evil people either!

Just go to Psalm 23:5.

It's easy to merely dismiss Psalm 139:19-22 as incoherent, but that's not the case. It carries on a recurring theme in the entire

book: Eliminate wickedness. But for this psalm today, it is not necessarily “a real petition directed against some particular identifiable threat” as James L. Mays discusses in his commentary.¹ The elimination of the wicked in this instance points to the wickedness that lies in each of us, whether intentionally or accidentally. We’ve all screwed up. And we will screw up until the day we die because we are human beings.

And think of the presumed author of these words: King David. He was no stranger to sin. A man who lusted for power and sex and whose family was broken because of his actions. And here he is, acknowledging the wrongs he has done. David is asking for God to

¹ James L. Mays. *Psalms*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1994, p.428.

judge him AND heal him. “Kill the wicked” he says! It’s not the wicked people around David, it’s the wickedness within him.

...the people who talk about you,

but only for wicked schemes...

He’s pointing to himself! He’s guilty of paying lip service and then turning around doing something contrary to God’s will!

But, we are reminded that God’s final answer on the matter for David is not judgement. It is healing. As we read together verse 24:

Look to see if there is any idolatrous way in me,

then lead me on the eternal path!

The final answer on the matter is healing. Healing that leads David on the eternal path, the path that declares in thought, word, and deed to love the LORD your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself.

It takes God's judgement AND God's healing to set David straight.

It takes God's judgement AND God's healing to set us straight.

We're guilty, too. We haven't necessarily done the same things as David, but we're human and we screw up. That's our reality. But, our loving God knows us better than we know ourselves. When we try to hide, when we try to evade, when we try to deny, when we try to deflect, God knows what's on our hearts and minds even before we do and PRAISE THE LORD it doesn't end with judgement. It ends in healing and continues on in a course change that is

directed by the LORD: The eternal path. The path we travel every day that declares to the world of our God who is serious about a relationship with everyone and will come chasing after each and every one of us in the morning, in the middle of the night, in heaven, in the grave, and everywhere in between! Yes, this path involves God's judgement. Praise God, this path involves healing!

Siblings in Christ, believe this Good News!

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.