

“Learning to Love Again”

Psalm 139:1-14

November 14, 2021

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“You have searched me and known me, O God...”

Psalm 139:1-

Prayer of Preparation

From the hour we first believed, O God, to the hour at hand may the words of my mouth and the meditation of our heart be acceptable unto you, our Refuge and Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon Message

During the first week of my renewal leave, I was walking along the Greenway Trail here in Franklin. It was a beautiful day, and I happened to come across a couple that was walking toward me. Our eyes caught each other’s eyes and one of them said to me, “Hey, I know you. Aren’t you the minister at Grace Church?”

My first thought was, “O great! What now?” But I said, “Yes, I am. I am one of the pastors.”

They shared, “Thanks for all your church does in the community.” Again, I thanked them and told them that we try to do what we can do. They were very gracious and open, and they were pleased to learn that I was on a renewal leave, as their pastor had left the ministry, apparently, over conflict about the pandemic. Not an easy topic, to say the least.

A couple days later I went to play pickleball – a game I have taken up – and as I was going through the introductions a person came up to me and said, “Hey, I know you. I see you on television.” I thought to myself, “When am I on television? Christmas? Easter?”

The gentleman said, “On Channel 91 at the Otterbein Community!” Of course! Residents at Otterbein can watch the services there on Channel 91 on

Sundays at 2:00 p.m. This person had seen me and recognized who I was. Small world!

But I thought to myself, “I can’t seem to go anywhere without someone knowing me.”

The kicker came several days later when our daughter Grace and I went to Nashville to go hiking in Brown County State Park. We were having breakfast in one of the restaurants there when I noticed a gentleman to my right staring at me. In fact, I told Grace that the man would not stop keeping his eyes on me. It began to feel uncomfortable. Have you ever had that happen?

Following breakfast, I walked by the table and the gentleman said to me those infamous words, “Hey, I know you.” To which I thought myself, “This can’t be happening.” He went on to say, “Aren’t you Mike Jennings from Cincinnati?” To which I said, “No, I am Andy Kinsey from Franklin, Indiana.” Apparently, I looked just like someone he knew. What is the saying? You have double somewhere in the world that looks just like you. No kidding!

From that point on, I became determined to travel incognito! All in good fun of course!

I Know You!

Those infamous words: *I know you!* I wonder if anyone has ever said those words to you. Maybe you were part of a social event, and someone came up and said, “I know you,” or maybe you were in a parking lot on vacation, or maybe a family member raised a voice in an argument and expressed to you those three words, “I know you.”¹

It all depends on the context, of course, and on the inflection of the voice. There is a layer upon layer of meaning to them, regarding texture, resonance.

For example, the words “I know you” can convey several meanings: they might turn a stranger into a long-lost friend, as in remembering the past: I know *you*. Or they might carry words of bitterness in that you don’t want to make a similar mistake like you did awhile aback, as in “I am never going to do that again. I *know* you.” Or maybe they are words shared in appreciation with warmth and

¹ Thanks to Sam Wells for insights into this sermon; cf., *Learning to Dream Again: Rediscovering the Heart of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, Inc., 2013), 30ff.

generosity: *I know you.* Whatever the occasion, notice the relationship, the context, the tone.

Psalm 139 in Proper Tone

Let us shift to Psalm 139, a Psalm where God says to each one of us, “I know you.” It is a Psalm that packs a punch on multiple levels, as David comes to terms with God’s knowledge and love of him.

Listen to what David writes, regarding the depths of God’s knowing: O Lord, you have searched me and known me. “You know when I sit down, and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts far away” (vv.1-2).

Here is a picture of God that knows us so well that God anticipates when we are going to sit down and when we are going to wake up, what we are thinking about and what we are going to think about. Here is God knowing what we are about to say and where we are headed.²

To be sure, we all might want people to think that we are wonderful and beautiful, clever, and fun. But we also might cringe to think that we are so examined and so scrutinized as profoundly as this, as to say: “You really do know me, Lord.” And it can be a bit scary. In fact, David continues: “You hem me in, behind and before, you lay your hand upon me” (v. 5). Again, it is both affirming and intimidating at the same time: God truly does know us, and we cannot escape that fact.

But there is also the dimension of height in this Psalm. David asks: “Where can I go to escape your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? ... If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me” (vv. 7, 9-10).

One of the most instinctive reactions we can have when we get scared of what people know about us is to run away; we can try to put ourselves physically in a place where do not have to endure the shame or the exposure of being known. We really don’t want people to find us.³

² Ibid., 32.

³ Ibid., 34.

There is, for instance, a legend about a person who sent an identical anonymous message on a Friday to a random selection of six Senators that simply said these words, “They know everything; flee.” – and by the end of the weekend, so the story goes, all six Senators had abruptly left town.

Psalm 139 proclaims that we cannot hide, and we cannot become invisible to God, however far we run. We cannot escape God’s love and we cannot escape God’s presence (Romans 8:31-39).

But there is an additional third dimension of this Psalm, and it takes this discovery of God’s knowledge even further. It is cosmic in scope when it says, “If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheole, you are there” (v. 8).

God’s presence is not limited to this life, to this earth. If we die, or if we go into perpetual darkness, or if we go into dazzling light, or if we are buried in the earth – wherever we are, or in whatever form we come to be, there God is, with us, beside us, among us, before us. God is always ever present – no matter what, regardless of feelings, emotions, circumstances. As Paul says in Romans, “Nothing can separate us from God’s love in Jesus Christ” (Romans 8:39). Nothing!⁴

But there is lastly a fourth dimension to God’s presence, to God’s knowledge, and it is about the dimension time. I can’t think of more precious and mysterious words in all of Scripture than these words: “For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made” (vv. 13-14).

In other words, God knew me before there was a “me” to know. God knew the days of my life long ago. God made me, and God created me into his image and likeness, as beautifully as an artist creates a painting, or as delicately as a surgeon makes stitches – all for God’s glory.

But note again, this mixture of fear and wonder: “I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” It is astonishing that God cares so much about such particulars. Indeed, I can remember my grandma saying to me, “God knows the number of hairs on your head – or what’s left of them! God knows you from head to toe.”⁵

⁴ Ibid., 25.

⁵ Ibid., 25.

Yes, God knows. God's knowledge is so great, but also so focused on you, on me! In Psalm 139, God says, "I know you."

Final Questions for Self-Examination

Let me ask you, "Who really knows you? Have you ever let another human being see into your soul?" On the other hand, do you really want anyone to know you that well? Do you really trust that if someone truly knows you that he or she would not expose you, reject you, shame you?

What is the adage, knowledge is power? You share, you open your life to someone, and now that person knows something intimate about you. What will they do with that knowledge? I am sure I am not the only person who has had such an experience of mistrust when someone shares such knowledge in a way that is not appropriate.⁶

And yet, when we speak of the *knowledge of God*, we are speaking of something different, for when we are speaking of the knowledge of God, we are also speaking of the *love of God – at the same time*. Unfortunately, with us, in our modern era, knowing and loving have become separate, disjointed, and there is the fear that if others really knew us, they would have power over us, or they would see through us and cease to love us.⁷

But God's knowing is not like that: with God, knowing and loving are identical. There is, for example, never a moment when God knows us but does not love us or loves us but does not know us. Indeed, God wholly knows us *because* God wholly loves us; and God wholly loves us *even though* God wholly knows us.⁸

That's the power of the gospel – love and knowledge united in God, in Christ; it is what I believe the apostle Paul says in Ephesians about how God can do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine, as God works in us his grace, all because God knows us and loves us (3:20). Such knowledge is indeed too vast to attain, even contain.

So let me ask you: looking back on your life, have you made knowing and loving separate? If so, write this Psalm on your heart. In fact, tell your family to read this Psalm to you, even on your deathbed. Because when your life ends, it will

⁶ Ibid., 36.

⁷ Ibid., 37.

⁸ Ibid., 37.

be time for love and knowledge to reunite, just as they are in Christ, just as they are when God raises you to eternal life, as when God will say to you: “I know you. And I love you.” Love and knowledge reunited *in you*: dear friends, that’s the joy of heaven! Amen.⁹

⁹ Ibid., 37.