

"Fearfully and Wonderfully Made"
Psalm 139:1-18
September 4, 2022
York Center Church of the Brethren
Pastor Christy Waltersdorff

Of all the people you know- who knows you the best? Think about that person for a moment. How long have you known them? What secrets do you share with them? What secrets do you keep from them? Do they know everything about you?

Besides my family, the friend I have known the longest is Annie Miller, known to some of you as Dr. Annie on Zoom worship. We have been friends since we were in the junior high Sunday School class together at the Codorus Church of the Brethren back in Pennsylvania. By my calculations we have been friends for 50 years! We shared a lot during our adolescent years- the good, the bad, and the embarrassing. Even though we went to different schools, we saw each other frequently at 4-H meetings and church activities. We even went to Penn State at the same time and lived in the same dorm--- but had very different majors!

When I was at Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey, she was in Medical School in Philadelphia- just over the border- and she visited me often in Alexander Hall. Now she lives in Pennsylvania, and I live here. Zoom worship connected us again from the start of the Covid pandemic. She often joins us on Zoom worship while working her shift at the Emergency Room.

Annie is one of the smartest people I know. (I wish I could see her face during this sermon!) Throughout my injury and recovery these past seven months, we often texted or talked on the phone about my medical issues. She is one of those friends that even if we don't see each other for months or even years at a time- we can always pick up where we left off.

We know things about each other that no one else knows- not even our husbands. We will guard each other's secrets until the grave. (Not that we have any deep dark secrets to spill.)

As well as we know each other, for as long as we have known each other, Annie and I still don't know **everything** about each other. And that is ok.

I don't think it is possible to know another person totally and perfectly. There are always feelings, thoughts, and experiences we have that are just not possible to share with another person - even those closest to us.

Like my family, when I am with my closest friends, I feel the most like myself. I feel affirmed and accepted for who I am. They know me very well and yet still love me. With them I can just be me without having to prove anything or do anything to earn their love.

Psalm 139 tells us that there is Someone who knows us intimately, better than anyone else ever can- and loves us still. This Psalm is a marvelous affirmation that we are known and accepted by God, the One who created us. This beautiful hymn articulates our deeply intimate relationship with God. The words of the poet tell us that God knows us personally and lovingly. This knowledge affirms our worth and our existence.

Even when we think we don't matter, God knows that we do. From beginning to end it is "I and You." Although the Old Testament is filled with stories of the importance of the community of God's people, this Psalm reminds us that we never get lost in the crowd. It affirms God's love for every person.

This Psalm almost feels like an answer to a profound question asked in Psalm 8.

O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.

³ *When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;*

⁴ ***what are humans that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?***

⁵ *Yet you have made them a little lower than God
and crowned them with glory and honor.*

⁶ *You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet,*

⁷ *all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,*

⁸ *the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.*

⁹ *O Lord, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!*

**what are humans that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?**

Why does God care so much about us puny little human beings? Perhaps because God created us, lovingly knitting us together before anyone else ever knew we existed. Not everyone may want to be known so intimately by God. After all, to be fully known is to be vulnerable. Do we really want God to be present with us in **every** place and **every** circumstance in our lives? Do we really want God to know what we are going to say before we say it? Do we really want to know that there is no place we can go where God is not already there?

The poet tells us that we are never free of God, but we are not God's prisoners because God relates to each of us out of love. Our response to such an intensely personal relationship with God is "wonder" which is defined as "a feeling of surprise mingled with admiration, caused by something beautiful, unexpected, unfamiliar, or inexplicable."

The poet finds comfort in the never-ending embrace of God. That Divine embrace is not confining or suffocating, but liberating and awe-inspiring. It is confirmation that God truly knows each one of us as individuals. Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann describes that relationship this way, "*The Psalms are prayers addressed to a known, named, identifiable You. This is the most stunning and decisive factor in the prayers of the Psalms.*"

Think about the constant presence of God as you would about the constant presence of the person you most love; the person you most want to be with. It might be like the way Martin Buber, an early twentieth century Jewish philosopher, describes our relationship with the Almighty, All- Knowing God:

"Where I wander- You!

Where I ponder- You!

Only You, You again, always You!

You! You! You!

When I am gladdened- You!

When I am saddened- You!

Only You, You again, always You!

You! You! You!

Sky is You, Earth is You!

You above! You below!

In every trend, at every end,

Only You, You again, always You!

You! You! You!"

The psalmist writes, *I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made, wonderful are your works that I know very well.* "In this text, the Hebrew word for "fearfully" isn't defined as being afraid. It means awe, respect, and honor. In the Old Testament it often appears as a synonym for "love," "cling to," and "serve."

"Wonderfully" comes from the Hebrew word which means to be different, striking, remarkable, outside of the power of human comprehension. The word is used often in the Psalms to describe the acts of God on behalf of humanity.

How might you see yourself if you believed that you were formed and framed by God reverently, wondrously, strikingly, remarkably, differently?

How might we see others if we believe that each one of us is a unique and precious creation of the Creator God?

This Psalm isn't just about a God who cares for us. It is about a God whose inescapable presence is part of our every breath, our every heartbeat. We hide nothing from God and yet God still loves us, calls us, leads us. When we feel lost in the great expanse of the cosmos this psalm reminds us that the God who created the universe, the God of Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Miriam, Mary and Joseph, the God of Jesus- this God seeks us and knows us. We are created in that divine image. We have the fingerprints of God all over us. We matter to God. What we do with our lives matters to God.

The poet knows that we can never really know all there is to know about God, *"How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast the sum of them! I try to count them- they are more than the grains of sand."* But for the poet, that is ok because, they wrote *"I come to the end- I am still with you."*

We gather in this place Sunday after Sunday to remind ourselves and each other that we indeed, have been fearfully and wonderfully made. We gather here to challenge one another to live fully in the embrace of *God*; to seek *God's* direction for our lives.

If we take the words of this Psalm to heart, we can find comfort in troubling times; we can find meaning in uncertainty. If we speak the words of this Psalm with conviction, we can find our place in *God's* great and wondrous creation because we are, indeed, fearfully and wonderfully made.

Amen.