

Last Monday at our Pastoral Relations Ministry meeting, Jim Manley offered 3 Psalms for our meditation. This Psalm was one of them and it has always been one of my favorites, so I offer a few reflections for your consideration this morning.

There are few passages of scripture that reassure me more than Psalm 139 that my life and God are forever and inescapably linked. The words of this Psalm describe a very broad and deep God definition. An early Process Theologian, Bernard Loomer, wrote an article titled: *Your God is Too Small*. So many people I meet say they don't believe in God; yet their definition of God is so small that I, myself, couldn't believe in the diety they describe. Psalm 139 describes a presence in the universe that pervades everyone and everything. It is a power moving through creation; it is the heart beat of creation; it is a pulsing, empowering presence. Why must we make God into our own image (and doing so, find that our God is too small)?

This Psalmist gives voice to a mystery that we sense but yet, do not fully understand. It is the Holy One who knows us human beings; the One who wove us inside and out into the intricate and miraculous bodies and souls that we are. This Psalm is poetry not history; because historical facts can not touch the greatness of the One in whom all the possibilities for this universe are held. This God is on the move searching for us, for life, always with us come hell or high water. We are hemmed in on all sides not from threat but from encompassing and all embracing love. This God is the wind beneath our wings that carries us to the farthest limits of our lives and back home again. Within this great power of the universe, time is not interpreted as past, present, and future. God's time enfolds the lives of all creation, and thus we are reminded that we are not the center of the universe; it's not all about us; but we are each an important part of the divine mystery. Albert Einstein said, "I want to know God's thoughts; all else is details." It is this kind of big and free imagination that draws us out of a self-focused daily existence and towards the miraculous mystery of a life where God alone holds the possibilities.

The Psalmist acknowledges evil in the world; he or she senses a threat and feels afraid. But then the poet asks God to search his or her own heart for any untoward thought or misguided way. We all have a shadow side; if we fight against it, it can bring us down. If we are humble enough to recognize it, it can become a strength. Here the Psalmist comes humbly asking to be lead in the way everlasting. It is human nature to think we have the power to chart our own future, until of course, we are forced to face the truth that there are indeed matters beyond our control. One of my favorite poems is by Madeleine L'Engle called "Abraham's Child." Here is part of that poem:

Towards afternoon the train pulled into the station....

The conductor slid open the door to the compartment and said to me,

'This is your last stop on this train. You will have to get out.'

I held out my passport, 'No, no, my journey's barely half over,'

and I told him the cities through which the train was going to pass.

He handed me back my passport and said again, 'You will have to get out,'

and he took me by the arms and led me from the coach.

'But I don't know where I am!' I cried, 'or where I am going.'

'Follow me' he said. 'I have been sent to show you....This is the way,'

and he led me past the passengers waiting on the platform and past the foreign signs and a burning lamp in this land where I was a stranger. He led me to a train with no lights and broken windows and a pale wisp of smoke lifting from a rusty engine, and said,

'Get in. This is your train.'

'Are you ready for the journey?' he asked me.

'Where are we going?' I asked. The train was cold.

'The way will be shown,' he said, and closed the compartment door,

I heard a puff of steam. The old engine began to pull the dark car,

and we ventured out into the night.

We are all Abraham's children, people on a journey with twists and turns and unplanned stops; yet we do not travel alone because we can not escape the presence of the Holy.

In this Psalm we hear a play on light and darkness and the darkness is a kind of threat to us; but darkness does not threaten God; God doesn't need a flashlight to see through the night. Sometimes darkness is synonymous with difficulty and trying times. But it is also a place of birthing. The dark womb nurtures the infant in its formation. The activist and writer Anne Lamott writes, **"Hope begins in the dark, the stubborn hope that if you just show up and try to do the right thing, the dawn will come. You wait and watch and work: you don't give up."** In our hard wired, self-sufficient, self-reliant human ingenuity ways, it is good to know that sometimes healing comes to us from the outside. It's not always up to us to make everything right. If so, we wouldn't need or know the gift of grace.

Now I've been struggling with a little OCD, obsessive compulsive behavior, as I try to cover all the basis for the time Tom and I will be on leave. I want to be responsible. I don't want to impose. I don't want to forget something important. (I think it is deeply rooted in a misguided longing that if I could just do everything right, nothing bad would happen; my beloved would not get cancer.) So this Psalm is very good for me. It helps me settle down and find my true place in the scheme of things. And when I stop long enough to catch my breathe, I know, that I don't have to plan everything in detail for the next couple of months because not only are you strong and capable and faithful, but we as a church can't escape God's presence in our midst and because of that, we are all going to be alright. I'd like to close with the modern translation of this Psalm which was what Jim brought to our meeting. It comes from a book by Leslie Brandt called *Psalms/Now*.

O God, You know me inside and out, through and through.

Everything I do, every thought that flits through my mind, every step I take, every plan I make, every word I speak, You know, even before these things happen.

You know my past; You know my future.

Your circumventing presence covers my every move.

Your knowledge of me sometimes comforts me, sometimes frightens me; but always it is far beyond my comprehension.

There is no way to escape You, n place to hide. If I ascend to the heights of joy, You are there before me. If I am plunged into the depths of despair, You are there to meet me. Ic could fly to the other side of our world and find You there to lead the way.

I could walk into the darkest of nights, only to find You there to lighten its dismal hours.

You were present at my very conception,

You guided the molding of my unformed members within the body of my mother.

Nothing about me, from beginning to end, was hid from Your eyes.

How frightfully, fantastically wonderful it all is!

May Your all-knowing, everywhere-present Spirit continue to search out my feelings and thoughts.

Deliver me from that which may hurt or destroy me, and guide me along the paths of love and truth.