

KNOWN BY GOD

Psalm 139

Even with finals going on this week, many students are dealing with the hurdles they have to go over to get a job. They are told that it is vital for a good job interview or resume to show a prospective employer what makes you so special and unique that they should want to hire you. To do that you need to have a good idea as to who you are and what you want to do.

Other young people, as they near the end of their time in college, are planning to get married soon. So they meet with the minister or counselor to talk about their future life together. One of the most difficult parts of that counseling involves knowing who you are as an individual before knowing the person you intend to marry. One tool used in premarital counseling is a worksheet entitled, “Getting to Know Me.” It asks these four questions:

1. What are the specific ways I want others to see me?
2. How do others really see me?
3. How do I see myself?
4. What characteristics do I see in myself that make it more difficult for you to love me?

People who are used to understanding complex formulas in engineering and physics find themselves scratching their heads trying to answer those questions.

“Who am I?” That is a question our confirmands will be asked this morning. They are going to be asked to identify what their faith is. And they are doing this at a time in their lives when that question - “Who am I?” - seems to be running around in their heads a lot. As we all deal with the questions running through our minds, do we feel ready to answer questions about the most important part of our identity—who we are in the presence of God? Do we see ourselves as disciples of Christ Jesus?

As we change from one part of life to another we can be affected by what is called the “imposter syndrome.” Do you relate strongly, somewhat, or a little to these statements:

I believe the success I’ve had is a fluke.

Even when I do well, I don’t think I really deserve it.

I worry about feeling overwhelming shame if my incompetence is ever revealed.

I worry that people will find out I’m not as smart as they think I am.

I downplay my achievements.

It’s hard for me to accept compliments.

I feel uncomfortable with praise.

I compare myself to others.

I feel like failing is not an option.

I hesitate to brag about my accomplishments.

I don’t like drawing attention to my successes.

Feel like things are more of a struggle for me.

I feel like I’m just making it up as I go.

Success doesn’t come easy for me; I have to work at it.

When we are not sure who we are, it makes it uncomfortable to reveal that to others. We are afraid that they will discover our weakness; that we aren't what people think we are. So how comfortable do we feel hearing these words from Psalm 139?

O LORD, You have searched me and You know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; You perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; You are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue, You know it completely, O LORD.

The secret fears we have, those things we are ashamed of, and the things we don't like about ourselves which we try to hide or hope people don't notice—God sees all of that.

Don't think that those fears go away as you get older. In high school you have to think about college and what to do with the rest of your lives. When those plans change in college, more doubts about who you are enter when you begin work after college. Then you may have to deal with those doubts as you enter into a marriage, have children, age into mid-life, and prepare for retirement. When we aren't sure who we are, we would just rather that people didn't know us that well or notice us.

But God does. Listen to Psalm 139:

You hem me in behind and before; You have laid Your hand upon me. Where can I go from Your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence? If I go up to the heavens, You are there: if I make my bed in the depths, You are there.

Reality TV and movies have placed peoples' everyday lives on display for everyone to see on the screen. Imagine our lives live on the internet. We live in a society that prizes privacy. As youth enter high school, there is a good chance that they would like more privacy in their own home. Think of how young people after high school move out of the house and get their own place. Wouldn't it be nice to have your own room—your own private space? People build their houses with garages in the front to provide a "barrier" between the busy street and the house. Computers and the internet enable us to build relationships with people we don't have to see and who can't see us. We can control what they know about us.

But we can't control God. David says in Psalm 139:

If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," even the darkness will not be dark to You; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to You.

Even if we aren't sure about ourselves, God knows us—completely!

Ever get caught with your hands in the cookie jar? Did you ever get caught cheating on a test, smoking in the boy's room, putting a dent in your dad's car because you drove too fast? In the presence of God we are caught, exposed. Even our most secret thoughts are made clear.

Guess what? God knows us. He knows everything about us. We can't hide. Nor do we have to. The God who knows all about us is also the God who loves us and cares for us despite our sin. David says in Psalm 139:

I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful, my frame was not hidden from You when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of earth, Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be.

God made you and me. A poster that used to be up in the church lounge read, “I am valuable. God doesn’t make junk.” And the God who made us continues to love us. That is what we can see in Jesus. Last Sunday we heard Peter remind us, “Salvation is found in no one else (other than Jesus), for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” Our epistle lessons this Easter season have come from John’s first letter where he says. “If anyone sins, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins.” In Psalm 139 David says:

Your works are wonderful. I know them full well.

We may have doubts about who we are, but we can be absolutely certain who our God is. He is the God who made us, who knows us, and who died on the cross to save us.

God knows us. In the language of the Bible “to know” isn’t just a matter of facts. You hope “to know” algebra in high school or calculus in college. But that is a matter of head knowledge and formulas. When the Bible says, “God knows us,” it means that God is totally committed to us. God knows everything factually about us far better than we do ourselves. But He also makes Himself intimate with us. That’s what you learned about Holy Communion. The almighty, all-knowing God comes to you and me in Jesus’ supper, so we can get intimate with Him. We can “know” Him as he knows us.

The mess that riots cause in our country should make us aware of how important it is to have control in society. We may complain about government, authorities, and all of that. But look what happens apart from that control.

How great it is to know that God is always in charge. He knows us. And even when everything else seems so out of control in death, which is the one thing no one can stop, He is there for us. So we don’t have to hide from God. Each day we can put our lives in His hands and say with David:

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.
Amen.