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Psalm 139:1-18

How do you love yourself?

Rev. Kerry Smith

Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Psalm 139:1-18 CEB

Lord, you have examined me.  You know me. You know when I sit down and when I stand up. Even from far away, you comprehend my plans. You study my traveling and resting. You are thoroughly familiar with all my ways. There isn’t a word on my tongue, Lord, that you don’t already know completely. You surround me—front and back. You put your hand on me. That kind of knowledge is too much for me; it’s so high above me that I can’t fathom it. Where could I go to get away from your spirit? Where could I go to escape your presence? If I went up to heaven, you would be there. If I went down to the grave, you would be there too! If I could fly on the wings of dawn, stopping to rest only on the far side of the ocean — even there your hand would guide me; even there your strong hand would hold me tight! If I said, “The darkness will definitely hide me; the light will become night around me,” 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! You are the one who created my innermost parts; you knit me together while I was still in my mother’s womb. I give thanks to you that I was marvelously set apart. Your works are wonderful—I know that very well. 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. 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. God, your plans are incomprehensible to me! Their total number is countless! If I tried to count them—they outnumber grains of sand! If I came to the very end—I’d still be with you.

Jesus says, this is the greatest commandment, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. And a second is like it, to love your neighbor as yourself. How do you love yourself? It sounds like such a simple thing, love yourself. But how do you do it? How do I love myself when I am wracked by guilt for the ways that I have fallen short? How do I love myself when I am sinful and I make mistakes and I am not nice? How do I love myself when all I can think about is the book that I stole from the school library in 3rd grade? And when I found it later when I was cleaning out my room, instead of returning it to the school library, I put it at the very bottom of the trash bag.

How do you love yourself? You see yourself as God sees you. Loving yourself is not selfish. Think about your best friend. They love you because you are you. Not because of something that you did to earn their love. They just love you.

I think one of the hardest things I have done in my life is to be a parent. And we are just now beginning the adolescent years. I pray to be a better parent every day, to be more patient and loving and kind. And it is amazing how much I love my children. When they were born, I remember holding their tiny bodies in my hands and the weight of the world felt like it was on my shoulders. I knew that I would protect them and fight for them and love them because they were mine and I was responsible for them. As a parent you are your child’s biggest cheerleader, you want them to succeed, you want their life to be better than your life.

I am so thankful for my parents. When I went to college, I did not call my parents much. I remember coming home that summer and asking my mom how it had been to have the house all to herself without any noisy kids around. She said that she had cried for weeks after I went to college, and I was in shock. I could not believe it. My mom had missed me? She said I would have known if I had called! I know that my parents love me so much, even when I forget to call. And I have never doubted a day in my life that they love me so much. That’s how it is supposed to be with parents. I realize that’s not always how it is, but that is how it is supposed to be. How do you love yourself? Imagine if you could love yourself like your parents love you. Because they see us for who we really are, flaws and all, and they love us deeply.

Our scripture talked about that this morning. God knows us. God is thoroughly familiar with all our ways. God knows us fully and completely. There is no part of us that is hidden from God. We can try to hide from ourselves, we justify things and lie to ourselves, but we cannot hide from God. If we go to heaven, God is there. If we go to the grave, God is there. If we fly on the wings of the dawn, or the far side of the ocean, God is there. God is in the darkness with us. There is no hiding from God. We can’t trick God. God is always with us whether we acknowledge God’s presence or not.

The preacher and writer Max Lucado has a great book called You Are Special. It is a story of the Wemmicks who are wooden people. All of the Wemmicks have been carved by a woodworker named Eli. All of the Wemmicks are different. Some have big noses, some have large eyes, some are tall and some are short. But they all were made by the same carver and they all live in the same village. All day, every day, the Wemmicks give each other stickers. Either a golden star sticker or a gray dot sticker. It you were a pretty Wemmick with smooth wood and fine paint, you got a golden star. But if your wood was rough or your paint was chipped, you got a gray dot. If you had a good voice or you could jump really high, you had a golden star sticker. Some of the Wemmicks had golden stars all over them. But others had gray dots all over them. Punchinello had a lot of gray dots. He tried to jump high, but he always fell. And when he was on the ground, the others would gather around him and give him gray dots. And when he fell, his wood would get scars, so he would get more gray dots. After a while he had so many gray dots that he didn’t want to go outside. He was afraid he would make a mistake, and then people would give him another gray dot. In fact, people would see how many gray dots he had, and they would give him more without any reason. People would say he must not be a good person since he has so many gray dots. So, they would give him more gray dots.

And after a while Punchinello believed them. I’m not a good Wemmick, he would say. And if we went outside, he would find other people who had lots of gray dots so he would feel better about himself around them. One day, he met a Wemmick who did not have any golden stars or any gray dots. Her name was Lucia. People would try to give her stickers, but they would just fall off. It didn’t matter if it was a golden star or a gray dot, it would not stick. Punchinello wanted to be like that. He didn’t want other people’s marks on him. So, he asked Lucia how she did it. How did she make the sticks fall off? Lucia said it was easy. Every day she would go see Eli the woodcarver and she would sit in his workshop.

Punchinello could not figure it out, so he decided to go to see for himself. Punchinello started the journey, but he knew that Eli wouldn’t want to see him, so Punchinello turned around and went back home. And he looked out his window and saw the wooden people giving each other golden stars and gray dots. “It’s not right,” he said to himself. So, he walked to Eli’s woodcarver shop. And everything was so big and Punchinello got scared and he turned around to go home. Then, he heard his name. “Punchinello? How good to see you. Come and let me have a look at you.” Punchinello couldn’t believe it. “You know my name?” “Of course. I made you,” Eli said. And Eli picked Punchinello up and set him on the bench. Eli looked at the gray dots and said, “It looks like you’ve been given some bad marks.” Punchinello said he hadn’t meant to, he had tried really hard.

Eli told Punchinello he didn’t care what the other Wemmicks thought. “You don’t?” Punchinello said? He couldn’t believe it. “No, and you shouldn’t either,” Eli said. “They’re Wemmicks just like you. What they think doesn’t matter. All that matters is what I think. And I think that you are pretty special.” Punchinello just laughed. “I am not special. I can’t walk fast. I can’t jump. My paint is chipped and peeling. Why do I matter to you?” Eli put his hands on Punchinello’s shoulders and said, “You are mine, Punchinello. That’s why you matter to me.”

Punchinello finally got up the courage to ask the question he had come to ask. “Why don’t the stickers stay on Lucia?” Eli said, “Lucia has decided that what I think is more important than what others think. The stickers only stick if you let them. The stickers only stick if they matter to you. The more you trust my love, the less you care about the stickers. Come to me everyday, and let me remind you how much I care. You are special because I made you. And I don’t make mistakes.”

Punchinello wondered if Eli really meant it. And he started to believe it. And when he did, a gray dot fell to the ground. May all of our gray dots fall to the ground. God made us and we are special. God doesn’t make mistakes. May we see ourselves as God sees us, and may we love ourselves as God loves us. If we can open ourselves up to God’s love, we will experience a peace that will transform not only how we see ourselves, but how we see the world around us. God knows us, God made us, and God loves us, just the way we are.