

September 8, 2019
Rev. Kerry Smith

Psalm 139 I Was There to Hear Your Borne Cry
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Psalm 139 New Revised Standard Version

O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away. You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it. Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast. If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night," even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you. 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. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed. How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! I try to count them—they are more than the sand; I come to the end—I am still with you. O that you would kill the wicked, O God, and that the bloodthirsty would depart from me—those who speak of you maliciously, and lift themselves up against you for evil! Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies. Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

I grew up in church. I grew up not only being taught about Jesus and God but also shown the love and the grace of God. Everyone at church was always so nice. People seemed genuinely happy to see me. When I was at church, I felt safe, I felt known, and I felt loved. Being a part of a church family taught me that love has hands and feet. I experienced that in my Sunday School teachers, in my youth choir director, in my Bible study leader, in my youth ministers, and in my youth counselors. I experienced that in people in church that would say hello to me because we had volunteered at something together. My family went on a mission trip, and all of a sudden there were more people who knew my name. It was like Cheers! Church was a place where I felt loved.

There was a character on Saturday Night Live in the 1990s called Stuart Smalley played by Al Franken. It was making fun of self-help tv shows and one of the lines that Stuart Smalley was famous for saying was, "I'm good enough, I'm smart enough, and doggone it, people like me." Why is it so hard for us to believe that? A few years ago for the back to school blessings, we made hearts to give all the kids that had the words from the book *The Help*. "You is kind. You is smart. You is important." It was the encouragement that the maid/nanny gave to the little girl who was constantly criticized by her mom. We say it here to the children at Greenland Hills, we tell them, "You are a blessing."

We may hear affirmation but sometimes it is hard for us to accept it and believe it. When I have those moments of self-doubt I think of the Great Commandment from Jesus. One of the scribes asks Jesus, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answers, "The first is Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:28-31) Love your neighbor as yourself. Why is it so hard for us to love ourselves?

We have been looking at some of the hymns that we sing because the words that we sing teach us about God. I was talking with a minister friend about the power of music and she said, "hymns are theology that seep into our soul." I love that image! *I Was There to Hear Your*

Borning Cry is one of my favorites because it reminds me of one of my favorite scriptures, Psalm 139. *I Was There to Hear Your Borning Cry* is sung from God's perspective which is unique in a hymn. So often we are singing praise to God, but in this song we hear from God. We hear in this song that God is with us at every step of our lives. Even though our lives are constantly changing, God's love is always there.

We Methodists talk about God's prevenient grace. It is the grace that goes before and it is God reaching out to us. It is there before we were aware of it and before we knew we needed it. God takes the initiative in reaching out to us. We don't have to beg and plead for God's love and grace because God is actively seeking us out.¹ God's prevenient grace stirs up within us a desire to know God and empowers us to respond to God's invitation to be in relationship with God. Our loving God is constantly reaching out to us, wanting to be at the center of our lives. *I Was There to Hear Your Borning Cry* tells us God is with us at our childhood, in our preteen years, and as we mature into a young adult. God is with us in our middle age and in the winter of our lives. God's promise is with us in life eternal.

Have you ever seen trapeze artists? They are doing incredible things way up high, but there is a net to catch them if they fall. Sometimes in our lives, we begin to fall and through God's prevenient grace we have a net available to us. God's grace is everywhere. We are caught up in the net of God's care.² Grace is God's active presence in our lives. It is always available and not dependent on our actions or response. It is a gift from God.

I feel God's grace at a church potluck where people share and some people like Barry Blackburn-Creel make 3 dishes. BJ Gavitt makes her delicious taco salad and everyone has enough to eat. I feel God's grace as adults volunteer to teach Sunday School to our children and youth here at Greenland Hills. This year one of our youth, Henry Devenport, volunteered to teach children's Sunday School. I love that! People who love kids, want to teach them about Jesus, and share with them the love of God simply because they are a part of our church family. I see God's grace when I think about all of your ministries outside of this church. I give thanks for teachers, Marli, Stephen, Jill, Emma, Amanda, Mark, Andrew, Michael, Robert, and more. I give thanks for those of you who create and those of you who are in a retired season and are busier than you were when you were working! Each one of you show me that love has hands and feet.

This summer a friend shared with me that their child said that they didn't believe in God. How do you show someone the existence of God? Saint Augustine of Hippo around the year 400 A.D. called God our sweetness.³ Thomas Aquinas in the 1200s called God the prophetic light. I taught English in Japan for a year after college and I taught an English conversation class on Tuesday evenings. It was a group of folks in their 30s-50s who wanted to practice their English. They had t-shirts made for our group. They were red and in white letters said Wee Wee Club. When I inquired as to why the t-shirts were titled that way, I was informed that is the sound that you make when you ride a bike down a hill. Wee Wee...

Yesterday when I was riding my bike with Everett helping him train for this 50 mile Boy Scout bike ride, I went down a hill and felt the wind at my face. I remembered the Wee Wee Club and I gave thanks to God for joy. How do you explain that God is with us throughout our lives? How do you remember God is with you when you can't feel God's presence? There is no lasting proof that God exists and there is no formula for how to get it back. And there isn't always an explanation when your life is falling apart.

¹ <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/our-wesleyan-heritage>

² <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/united-methodist-beliefs-prevenient-grace>

³ <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/466948-you-never-go-away-from-us-yet-we-have-difficulty>

Our faith says that we should be bowled over by God's grace because God is abundant. In Psalm 139 we are told over and over again that God knows us. The writer of Psalm 139 isn't trying to write out a scholarly treatise about how God works. They want us to know that God knows us and that God is with us. Our lives come from God, belong to God, and find their true destination in God's purposes. It is like Paul says in Romans 8:29, nothing "in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The Psalmist is sure of one thing, God is always with us. We celebrate that at Christmas when we sing *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*. God is Emmanuel, which means God is with us. In so much of our life, it isn't until we are desperate that we are able to open ourselves up to the love of God and the desire for community. We need community. We need to receive.

Today begins National Suicide Prevention Week. Its goal is to inform the public about suicide prevention and warning signs of suicide. It feels like a week can't pass without hearing of another death by suicide.

There are 47,000 suicides in the US each year. 1.2 million people attempt suicide each year. If you haven't yet, you will one day know someone who attempts or completes suicide. In a 2017 Youth Risk Behaviors survey, 7.4% of youth in grades 9-12 reported that they had made at least one suicide attempt in the past 12 months. Female students attempted almost twice as often as male students and black students reported the highest rate of attempt at 10%. Nationally, the highest suicide rate was among adults between 45 and 54 years of age. The second highest rate was among adults 85 years or older. In America, 70% of deaths by suicide in 2017 were by middle-age white males. On average there are 129 deaths by suicide a day, half of those are using a firearm.⁴

There is no single cause to suicide. It most often occurs when stressors exceed current coping abilities. Some warning signs are change in behavior or entirely new behaviors. Things like withdrawing from activities, isolating from family and friends, lack of sleep or too much sleep, or change in concentration.⁵ How can we help? What can we do? We can assure someone that we will be there and that there is help. It is okay to say to someone I don't know what the answers are, but I'm going to be here for you. I'm not going to leave you. There is help and this isn't the forever step that you want to take. We are privileged here at Greenland Hills to have the Executive Director at the Mental Health America of Greater Dallas, Bonnie Cook, as a part of our church family. You are not alone, there is help. Please reach out to me.

God has given us a wonderful gift and God walks with us through our difficult times and there is so much that God wants us to do with this one wild and precious life that we have been given. God loves us. Your story, your past, your questions, your too-much, your not-enough, your doubts, all of you is loved by God, is loved by me, and is loved by this church.⁶ God is here, you are loved. That is enough. That is the good news.⁷

⁴ <https://afsp.org/about-suicide/suicide-statistics/>

⁵ <https://afsp.org/about-suicide/risk-factors-and-warning-signs/>

⁶ <https://twitter.com/sarahbessey/status/1169307274717945856>

⁷ From Kate Bowler's *Everything Happens for a Reason and Other Lies I've Loved*.