

Sermon

1/14/23

Year B , 2nd Sunday after Epiphany

Lord, you have searched me out and known me;

Good morning, St. Dunstan's Family!

It is good to be with you this morning. It's been a while.

As you are aware, this is delightful kickoff of a very special week in my life.

Today is the last Sunday I will get to serve you as a 'transitional deacon.'

Next time you see me behind this lectern, bring your sunglasses... because I might be glowing! This coming Thursday on January 18, I will be receiving the orders to become an ordained priest into the **Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States of America**, that's our official name. (One of the many things I learned in seminary.)

The national church website says:

"The Episcopal Church follows Jesus into loving, liberating, and life-giving relationships with God, with each other, and with the earth.

We are the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement."

May St. Dunstan's and I always point to Jesus!

Today, I get to share with you from the psalter, Psalms 139.

I fell in love with this psalm as a sassy, dark-haired teen. (you can tell that has been a hot minute). The words filled my heart.

As you reflect on your life with the Holy Scriptures, perhaps there are certain portions of God's word which spoke to you at different times in your life?

I recall learning certain Bible verses as a child-

"God is love."

Or from the King James version:

"Be ye doers of the Word and not hearers only."

And "God loveth a cheerful giver."

Psalms 139 is a portion of God's word that I can specifically remember reading and feeling an overwhelming sense of closeness to God, feeling amazed that

I, this worried teen, could relate to an ancient poem, written hundreds and hundreds of years ago.

Psalms is a collection of 150 ancient Hebrew poems, songs, and prayers that come from different eras in Israel's history. 73 of these psalms are connected to King David, who was a poet and a musician, not to mention a slew of other abilities and gifts.

There were also many other authors involved. Asaph wrote 12 poems, the sons of Korah produced 11, and many other worship leaders in the temple contributed as well. 2 are connected to King Solomon and 1 psalm to Moses. Nearly one-third of the poems (**49**, to be exact) are anonymous.

If you pay close attention to the headings of the poems, you'll notice that in **5** different places, Bible translators included the headings: Book One through Book Five. The reason for these divisions is that each section has a final poem, which concludes with a similar line that looks like an editorial addition,

“May the Lord, the God of Israel, be blessed forever. Amen and Amen”

With the Psalms are divided into 5 different books. Psalms 139 can be found in 5th book.

The entire Bible is a book of stories. Within this book of stories, the story of David is the most extensively narrated single story in this large story. We know more about David than any other person in Holy Scripture.

We can't be sure of when David wrote this Psalm.

But we can use our gift of imagination to think about a time David **might** have written these words.

Scripture tells us that David was a shepherd. He protected his flock. No doubt they would go to distant pastures for extended periods of time, to obtain optimal grazing. Perhaps on one of those warm summer nights, David wrote this psalm gazing at the night sky. Who doesn't feel humbled when the black night presents the vast array of stars, shimmering, dancing across the atmosphere?

Or

Maybe David wrote this psalm after one of his many children were born. Ahh the miracle of new birth.

Bill and I are going to be grandparents for this first time. Our little bundle of love is due within the next four weeks. When I see our daughter post a picture on Instagram verse 12 comes to mind

¹²For you yourself created my inmost parts; *

you knit me together in my mother's womb.

Then in v. 15

¹⁵Your eyes beheld my limbs, yet unfinished in the womb;

all of them were written in your book; they were fashioned day by day, when as yet there was none of them.

Again, I am reminded of the **gift of life** every time I read,

¹³I will thank you because I am marvelously made; *

your works are wonderful, and I know it well.

Or perhaps King David wrote this as an elder statesman, remembering his

relationship with God throughout the years,

maybe he was recalling the sweetness of walking with God.

¹⁶How deep I find your thoughts, O God! *

how great is the sum of them!

¹⁷If I were to count them, they would be more in number than the sand; *

to count them all, my life span would need to be like yours.

When I read this psalm, I hear this authentic voice writing about a real

relationship.

Every year the Merriam-Webster company chooses a word for the year.

They analyze the 'search volume' on their dictionary website. Next, they

determine what word had the substantially highest search rate for that year.

You can figure out why the words for 2020 and 2021 the most searched pandemic and vaccine.

Can you guess the word for 2023/24?

The word is ***authentic***.

As a society we are driven by worries about artificial intelligence, fake news reports, and all the anxieties social media presents; people are worried about what is truthful. People are wondering who they can trust.

“We don’t always trust what we see anymore,” reported the editor-at-large at Webster’s.

Although being an authentic person is somewhat hard to define, it is often described as someone who is true to their own self. Richard Rohr is a Franciscan priest and prolific author. He wrote the book balling upward. Roller says,

“I believe that God gives us our soul, our deepest identity, our true self, our unique blueprint, at our own Immaculate Conception Our unique little bit of heaven is installed by the manufacturer within the product, at the beginning! We are given a span of years to discover it, to choose it, and to live our own destiny to the full. If we do not, our True Self will never be offered again, in our own unique form...Our souls discovery is utterly

crucial, momentous, and of pressing importance for each of us and for the world. We do not “make” or “create” our souls, we just “grow” them up. “The Latin root of the word authentic is “author.” An authentic person, then, becomes the author of their own life. Authors grow stories.

Hmmm. This is something I haven’t considered before. Not the making or creating but the **growing** of my soul. From reading Psalm 139 with this perspective perhaps this is a view the psalmist knew.

Rohr goes onto say,

“All we can give back and all God wants from any of us is to humbly and proudly return the product that we have been given... Which is ourselves.”

God revealed himself to the world through Jesus. Jesus soothed the hurting souls all around him. That’s why in our Gospel reading today, Phillip and Nathaniel are ready to stop what they were doing and follow Jesus. God has a way of reaching across all the walls and facades we build around our hearts, our false selves, by revealing his character. Jesus came to earth in the form of matter. St. John of Damascus said,

“I worship the Creator of matter who became matter for my sake, who willed to take His abode in matter, who worked out my salvation through matter.”

God's nature is in Psalm 139 reveal.

God is:

omniscient, all knowing,

omnipresent, all present,

an omnipotent, all powerful.

These are three very strong words in our language & they each describe a part of God's character seen throughout Psalm 139.

Yet it's the poetry within these verses, the art-filled phrases make my soul dance.

When I hear these words it's like a mother caressing her distraught baby.

The Mama whispers, holding that baby tight calming the childlike only the mother can do.

Of Christmas morning, Fr Ramon shared a wonderful message of how the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. The "Word" of Psalm 139 was made flesh in the person of Jesus. The character of the God the Father is revealed in this Psalm. And it is the same nature we get to experience personally through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in us.

However, Psalm 139 has been my 'go to' Psalm for well over 'two score and a decade.'

Psalm 139 is a conversation between the poet and the Creator.

May Psalm 139 become a conversation between you and your Creator too.