

“Searched and known by God”

September 5, 2010

Text: Psalm 139:1-10

I.

Names are important. Names are important because people are important. Don't we all want to be known? Minimally, for example, don't we want people to know our name, know something of our life-story, something of our human journey through this life?

People write memoirs because they want the meaning of their lives, the events of their lives to be remembered—particularly to their family members and friends. We talk all the time about a person's legacy, what we pass on to succeeding generations.

This all varies, of course, from person to person, but none of us wants to sail through life unknown, unseen and unloved.

Moreover, to those of us in whom a yearning for the divine burns, we want to be reassured that there is a force and reality in the universe that understands us, has compassion for us, and has high hopes for us? In our reading **from Psalm 139**, the Psalmist cries out ... and we can feel his hunger for God:

*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 are acquainted with my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue, O God, you know it completely.
You're everywhere about me, and lay your hand upon me.*

The power of the Psalms of the Bible is that they have *soul* and they are so very human. From these marvelous, poetic glimpses into the human-divine relationship, we have a distinct sense that the Psalmist has been there. He's experienced what we, too, experience—in all of our different life stories.

In this sense, the psalms are utterly human. And because of the depths of their humanity, they provide glimpses into the divine.

II.

Imagine how these gripping words from **Psalm 139** might sound—of God actually *searching us and knowing us ... and laying God's hand on us*. How might these words sound to any gathered congregation ... or group of believers ... or to any human person anywhere in the world?

1. To the struggling people of Haiti, where the rebuild is limping along at best and where despair and fear fill so many hours of so many days.
2. To the miners and their families in Chili ... trapped in their fears and yet clinging to hope.
3. To the victims of the awful flooding in Pakistan and other parts of the world—not knowing what they will do or where they will go.
4. To people in New Orleans still struggling, five years removed from the disaster of Hurricane Katrina. Lives still in disarray ... trying to hold on to hope, to find their way into a better tomorrow.
5. To the countless refugees of the earth—the abandoned, the bereaved, those beaten down by the sheer inertia of life's forces.

And, finally, how do these words sound to us? With what's going on in our lives? Given what each of us contends with week after week, day in and day out?

III.

Sunday after Sunday, we gather for worship. Each of us comes with our own life-story: our own sadness and sorrow, frustration and disappointment; our own hopes and dreams, triumph and defeat, determination and resolve, optimism and confidence.

We each come with our own stuff.

1. Some come with anxiety about finances ... about the security of our job ... anxiety about the pay-cut we've had to take, or fear is coming, and what does will it mean for us and our families?
2. Others here today are worried about their personal health ... or the health of a dear family member or friend.
3. Still others come with the pain and emptiness of personal losses ... of loved ones who are so deeply missed.
4. Many of us come with worries about our children or grandchildren. We're concerned about their future. We want so very much for them to have a good life.
5. Some of us are anxious about our retirement. Are we going to continue to be okay and to make ends meet?

We each have our story to tell; and the words of the Psalmist reassure us:

O Lord, you have searched me and known me.

These words remind us that we're not alone; and that the God of our faith is a God who relentlessly pursues us. In fact, God pursues us in such earnest that we can't escape from God even if we tried.

*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 ...*

To be searched and known by God is reassuring. It reminds us that there's an energy, a power, an impulse in the universe that surrounds us with feeling, compassion and love.

And how do we experience that? We discover it, friends, in the crucible of our daily experience. No matter what our life experience, over time—if we open ourselves to faith—it builds up into an experience of God. But we have to work at it. We have to do our part. We have to meet God half way.

IV.

Three weeks ago yesterday, I was here in the sanctuary coordinating the delivery of flowers for a Memorial Service later that day. The delivery person was a young woman—probably mid to late twenties. As she was preparing to leave, somewhat abruptly, she asked me,

How do you get your faith back? I've feel like I've lost my faith.

She sort of caught me off guard. And, of course, that's not the kind of question you can answer with simple platitudes or in casual conversation as she's walking slowly out of the sanctuary to continue with her deliveries.

I remember responding, *one day at a time*. But what I really wanted was a chance to spend some time with her to talk about faith-building and building a relationship with God. Unfortunately, I never heard back from her and I didn't have her number.

However, if I had, I would have talked to her about **Psalm 139** ... and about the God who *searches us and knows us*; about the God whose *hand is ever upon us*, who cannot and will not let us go; about the God who pursues us and seeks us out even to *the farthest limits of the sea*.

I would have talked to her about the God who has a vision—a hope—for the life of every human being—for your life and my life. It's not so much a plan as a vision. A plan sounds too set and settled, as if it were all somehow predetermined; there's not enough room for human freedom. I much prefer to think of it as a vision—a vision of possibilities, of what our life can become for God's purposes.

V.

In the somewhat obscure book of **Malachi**, one of the minor prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures, the prophet talks about the coming of a *messenger* ... and this messenger *shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver* (Malachi 3:3).

Some women in a Bible Study were puzzled one day about what that verse meant and one of the woman volunteered to make an appointment with a *silversmith* to try and learn, first hand, how the silversmith refines a piece of silver over the fire.

Arriving at the silversmith's shop, the silversmith began by explaining to the woman how it was necessary to hold the piece of silver in the middle of the fire where the flames were hottest in order to burn away the impurities. Remembering the scripture verse about the *messenger* sitting as a *refiner and purifier of silver*, the woman asked if it was true that he had to sit in front of the fire the whole time the silver was being refined?

Yes, the man said. And not only did he have to sit there holding the silver, but he had to keep his eyes on it the entire time because if the silver was in the flames a moment too long, it would be destroyed.

Mulling this over a few moments, the woman then asked the silversmith, *How do you know when the silver is fully refined?*

He smiled at her and answered, *Oh, that's easy—it's when I see my image in it.*

Wow! You see, friends, that's how God watches over us (at least, that's God's intent)—*searching us and knowing us ... working in our mind, heart and spirit* until God sees God's image in each of us. Now that may take a long time. Some of us can be more than a little hard headed and stubborn.

No matter! God is relentless ... not giving up on any of us ... living in us and standing with us through whatever winds blow our way.

May God see God's image in each of us, friends, in these days that are ours. May God see God's image in our nation ... that we might find ways of coming together, of being more tolerant and forgiving and compassionate ... in a word: more *Christ like*. And may God see God's image in the richness of diversity that is our world!

All praise be unto God! Amen!

Dr. Jeffrey E. Frantz
Miami Lakes Congregational Church, *United Church of Christ*
6701 Miami Lakeway South
Miami Lakes, FL 33014
On the web at www.mlcchurch.com