



6 PENTECOST
JULY 19-20, 2014

1ST, MARSHALL
PASTOR SCOTT FULLER

PSALM 139:1-18; 1 Kings 19:4-18
For You

Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.

[Group re-reads Psalm 139]

The composer of Psalm 139 has done an incredible job of encapsulating the relationship between ALMIGHTY GOD and...*little, tiny, you-and-me*. It is NOT a relationship based on equality – between entities that share similar powers. NOR is it a relationship based on mutual needs – as in: *you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours*. Simply put, God is **G O D**, and, as such, holds all the cards.

Religious people have forever tried to find ways that describe these ultimate powers of God. Many have found it helpful to use the *omni* words like omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence – which are not words that we use everyday! Simply put: **omni** comes from a Latin word that means *all; in all ways; without limits*. So we confess that God is ***all-knowing, all-powerful, and everywhere present***...which is an ***incredible blessing***...*IF...IF...IF* God is also always good.

I mean, listen again to what the psalmist says: The Lord has *searched* us and *known* us. God knows *when we sit down and when we rise up*. God *discerns* all our *thoughts* (**yikes!!**) and knows ***all*** the *things we do*...even the ***words*** that we are about to speak.

At our Hill Street worship service on Thursday, I shared this psalm. And we talked about how it can be a little unnerving to acknowledge that God is so intimately aware of our deeds, thoughts, and words...oh, our words. **Have you ever said anything you've instantly regretted?**

Says the psalmist: (v. 4) *Before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely* – And ***that*** reminds us of ***all*** the times we've proven the lie to that nursery rhyme: *sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me*. We all know that a broken bone can be forgotten, but that some ***hurtful***

words we carry with us **forever** – both those we've **heard** *and*...those we've **spoken**.

Then Marlene Nordby said something like, *So if God knows what we're going to say before we say it, then why doesn't he stop us???* Good question, right?

The Lord *hems us in, behind and before*, and we cry out, *Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?*

In short, there's no getting away from God,
no hiding from Heaven's holiness,
no slipping away from the Spirit of the Lord.

As I was working on my sermon this week, this relationship made me think of two different songs. The first was the most popular rock song of 1983 entitled Every Breath You Take, by the group, Police.

The composer, the artist named Sting, said he meant it to be a love song, but that now he admits it can sound a little creepy. The words are:

*Every breath you take, And every move you make
Every bond you break, every step you take...I'll be watching you
Every single day, And every word you say
Every game you play, every night you stay...I'll be watching you*

Again, that **might** be a *nice blessing*...but **ONLY** if the one doing all that watching is also *always good*.

The **second** song is one we all know by heart, so let's sing it together... **Santa Claus Is Coming to Town**...

Here we go, oh...

*You better watch out, You better not cry.
You better not pout I'm telling you why: Santa Claus is coming to town.
He's making a list, And checking it twice; He's gonna find out
Who's naughty and nice...Santa Claus is coming to town
He sees you when you're sleeping, He knows when you're awake.
He knows if you've been bad or good So be good for goodness sake!
Ohh! You better watch out! You better not cry.
You better not pout I'm telling you why: Santa Claus is coming to town.*

Now, Santa's a **little** less creepy than the rock song, but still kind of unsettling when you think about the words. The fact that Santa **knows** all – and **sees** all – **especially** noting if we've been **bad** or **good** – doesn't leave much hope that our stockings will ever be full, am I right?

If you live and breathe,
 if you think bad thoughts and do sinful deeds,
 if you're far less than perfect and not much better than the next person,
 if you're not using all of your gifts from God
 to bless your neighbors for Jesus' sake...
 then you are just like me –
 and that leaves us painfully aware of
 how much God could – and should – be disappointed in us.

So Psalm 139 really fits the profile of one of those good news/bad news **jokes**. The **good news** is that *God knows everything about you*. The **bad news** is that *God knows everything about you*.

So the question becomes – what do we do with this knowledge that God knows everything about us, and we cannot hide anything from God??? Yet still we try – though all our attempts at hiding from God are about as effective as my granddaughter when she plays her version of hide-and-seek... Sophia = Sophie = Sosie (for an almost 2 yr. old) will cover her eyes with her hands and then call out: *Where's Sosie?*

Our daughter and son-in-law, Rachel and Tim, great pastors and great parents, figured out a neat way to make that game work. They ask her back: *Is Sophie in her sleeve?* Sophie will take her hands away from her eyes, pull open her sleeve, look inside it, and say, No. Then they'll ask: *Is Sophie under her chair?* Sophie will drop her hands from her eyes, lean over, look under her chair, and say, No. On and on the game goes, until she finally drops her hands and wears a smile that says, ***Here I am – and you didn't know it!!!***

Psalm 139 tells us that God is **all-knowing**, that God is **all-powerful**, that God is **always everywhere**... And the very good news here is that the Psalmist *gets it* that God is good, that God is eager to love, that God is fired by a passion to both lead us into service **and** to hold us close.

Though we are **far** from **perfect**, and much **less** than we *could-and-should be*, God does **not** hold that against us. God, *unlike Santa*, is **not** *making a list and checking it twice in order to see who's naughty and nice*. Instead, God is always and everywhere **for us**: supporting us, delighting in us, encouraging us, and...forgiving us.

And today we get to celebrate that blessing by sharing in the Lord's Supper. In the words of institution, says Martin Luther, there are two words of the utmost importance. Turn to page 108 in the forward portion of your hymnal and follow along as I read the words. Then I want you to tell me which two words you think Luther's talking about.

Here goes: *In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks; broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take and eat, this is my body, given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me. Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people, for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me.*

OK – which two words do you think are the most important? *for you*

And **here** we have the **very best** news of all, that Almighty God, who sees us at our best **and** at our worst, who knows us inside **and** out, who calls us by name **and** gives us everything good, *that God has given himself for us*...for us, for you and me and all people everywhere.

What does this mean for us? Well, the **first** thing is that we don't have to waste any time trying to hide from God – all our efforts are as effective as my granddaughter thinking that she's hiding by covering up her eyes. The **second** thing we don't have to do is beat ourselves up for being less than perfect. We are who we are – God knows that better than anybody, and still God completely loves us.

The **third** thing it means is that we are set free from worrying about whether or not God claims us as heaven's beloved children. Warts and all, God delights in who we are – because of Whose we are.

So **what** do we do now that we **don't have** to do **anything** to earn God's favor? Well, **Jesus** gave himself *for us*...I'm thinking God would love it if we gave **ourselves** for our **neighbors** – for **Jesus'** sake. Amen.