

“Shaped, Searched, Spirited”
Pentecost 16, Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18, 23-24
September 1, 2016, CUCC, Buena Vista, Colorado
Rev. Rebecca Kemper Poos

I. SHAPED

“Lord, you have searched me and known me. You have known me before I was even born—knit me together in my inmost parts; formed me in my mother’s womb, shaped my life. Guided me, anticipated my path, even before I even realized it!”

This passage in the Psalms may be the most intimate in the bible. God’s closeness to human beings –so personal and real. God is not a distant observer, hanging out in the clouds, watching to see if we trip-up or get it wrong. Nor is God the marionette, pulling our puppet strings and controlling everything we do and say—a benevolent yet judging puppeteer.

“For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.”

Literally, “You created my kidneys,” You see, the language of the Bible is very concrete! The kidneys are often associated in that context with decision-making. We have to dig way down deep inside ourselves as humans to discern right and wrong; make good decisions. And to do so, we need to go deep. Deeper even than our hearts. To the kidneys!

II. SEARCHED

“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.

Let’s face it—that can be a little frightening! There’s a fine line between a comforting Creator God and Presence, and a Stalker God. Some people really struggle with this. And it’s because of how this has been interpreted to be the Puppeteer God, outside of us—separate from us and controlling everything we do and

say. The “everything happens for a reason” Old Man in the sky kind of God. Rather than the One “in whom we live and move and have our being.”

“I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.”

There’s hint of fear here –as if the psalmist wants to declare, “how wonderful!” But, it’s more like, “Well, isn’t that *something*?!”

Cuz, “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me to grasp; I can’t quite get my head around it!”

And.... about that knowing everything I do and say, where can I go to get away from you, anyway?!”

Frederick Buechner says this IS a tension. And, we might just have to live in that tension—along with the psalmist and everybody else. He says:

“Stop trying to protect, to rescue, to judge, to manage the lives around you . . . remember that the lives of others are not your business. They are their business. They are God’s business . . . even your *own* life is not your business. It *also* is God’s business.

Leave it to God. It is an astonishing thought. It can become a life-transforming thought . . . unclench the fists of your spirit and take it easy . . . What deadens us most to God’s presence *within* us, I think, is the inner dialogue that we are continuously engaged in with ourselves, the endless chatter of human thought. I suspect that there is nothing more crucial to true spiritual comfort . . . than being able from time to time to stop that chatter . . .”

— **Frederick Buechner, Telling Secrets**

Another wise one’s words:

“The answers you seek never come when the mind is busy, they come when the mind is still.”

The struggle is real. How wonderful to be known by God, but how fearful at the same time. Can we have it both ways? Finding comfort in that—that God knows us even better than we know ourselves? Or is it too confining? Does it assault our sense of rugged individualism.

Preacher Jeremy Troxler suggests we engage the struggle, and live in that “not quite resolved” place, because that is where life is to be found.

He says:

“You have *searched* me” -- the word can have the sense of digging into, of drilling down. “Lord, you have *excavated* me.” “Lord, you dig me.” “You dig me, Lord.”

“God digs you. When no one else notices you -- when no one else has the time to bother -- God searches you. You are endlessly, fascinatingly interesting to God. God doesn’t get tired of you. God searches you. God knows you.

“This is the God whose eye is on the sparrow. This is the God who keeps your tears in a bottle. This is the God who took out the divine knitting needles and crocheted you together, stitch by stitch, in your mother’s womb. This is the God who tallies the number of every hair on your head -- admittedly easier for some of us than others, but still--

“This is the God for whom there are no anonymous sheep, to whom nobody is a write-off, for whom no one is lost in the crowd. The personal God who loves the number one: one lost sheep, one missing coin, one sinner lost and found.

“How wonderful it is to be known by God, but how fearful as well!”

For, there’s more: “You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.” The Hebrew word for “hem in” used here doesn’t mean cuddle. It doesn’t refer to a protective embrace, a great big bear hug, or to being wrapped in Bubble Wrap.

“Hem me in” is more like siege—like when a city is under siege! You besiege me. You entrap me. You encircle me. You beleaguer me, behind and before. You will *not* leave me alone.”

Comforting that God digs us? Yes. But, there’s an edge to it! A hem on all sides. Frightening to be searched and known better even than we know ourselves? Yes! But, there’s relief in that too. For God has known us from the get-go and there’s nothing left to hide. Nothing that *can* be hidden. Whew! All is accepted. Search away! Nothing will be found within you that is not already known and embraced.

Troxler concludes:

“The surrender to the siege is a sweet one. For the God of unconditional surrender is the God of unconditional love. The God who won’t let us escape is also the God who fearfully and wonderfully made us in the first place.”

III. SPIRITED

God fills us with our life breath—our spirit—the force. En-spirited, en-souled, we are spirited into the world to live out the life that has been shaped and searched and formed. Not guessing how it’s supposed to unfold, but, filled with the Spirit, co-creators of that life *with* God. The life that wants to be lived in us is this life of *our* spirit—the spirit God has put within us. That which is sacred within us—of God—given before we were even breathed into life.

O Lord, you have searched us and known us: We are fearfully and wonderfully made and known.
Where can we go from your spirit?
Where can we flee from your presence?
Nowhere. Thank you, God.
Search us, then, and know our hearts.

Test us and know our thoughts.
See if there is any wicked way in us,
and lead us in the way everlasting.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

Van Morrison, singer songwriter nails it in his haunting, Celtic lament:

“When will I ever learn to live in God?
When will I ever learn?
He gives me everything I need and more
When will I ever learn?”

On this Labor Day weekend, we reflect on our lives, our work, our life in God. God searches and knows us. God en-spirits us with the life that is ours to live. We live into ourselves most fully when we listen to that spirit and live it with our whole heart, soul and strength.

Our work may feel like a J-O-B if we don't think of it as a calling to live our lives most fully in God. But, it doesn't have to be that way. Our vocation, our purpose in life is to live out our calling wherever we find ourselves—with our whole beings.

Talitha Arnold says this Psalm encourages us in that daily search for meaning.

“Whatever our work,” she says, “I think we yearn for the One who knows, in the words of Psalm 139, “when we sit down and when we rise up.” The One who searches out our paths and is acquainted with all our ways, wherever we are and whatever work we're doing.

In [*The Oxford Book of Prayer*](#), an Arab Christian named Mustafah gives voice to that longing in his prayer about his work:

“O God, I am Mustafah the tailor and I work in the shop of Muhammad Ali. The whole day long I sit and pull the

needle and the thread through the cloth. O God, you are the needle and I am the thread. I am attached to you and I follow you. When the thread tries to slip away from the needle, it becomes tangled and must be cut so that it can be put back in the right place. O God, help me to follow you wherever you may lead me.

Prayer

Help us, God, to trust that you are the needle and we are the thread, and that our true work is simply to follow you.

“When will I ever learn to live in God?
When will I ever learn?
He gives me everything I need and more
When will I ever learn?”

We learn to live in God when we learn to be the thread. To find ourselves encased in the eye of the needle, led and guided by the One who made us and knows us best. Who hems us in, around and before and points us in the right direction.

Amen.