

To Be So Loved...
Twelfth Sunday after Trinity
(from the Psalm: 139)

O LORD, thou hast searched me out, and known me. Thou knowest my down-sitting, and mine uprising; thou understandest my thoughts long before.
2 Thou art about my path, and about my bed; and art acquainted with all my ways.
3 For lo, there is not a word in my tongue, but thou, O LORD, knowest it altogether.
4 Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me.
5 Such knowledge is too wonderful and excellent for me; I cannot attain unto it.
6 Whither shall I go then from thy Spirit? or whither shall I go then from thy presence?
7 If I climb up into heaven, thou art there; if I go down to hell, thou art there also.
8 If I take the wings of the morning, and remain in the uttermost parts of the sea;
9 Even there also shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.
10 If I say, Peradventure the darkness shall cover me; then shall my night be turned to day.
11 Yea, the darkness is no darkness with thee, but the night is as clear as the day; the darkness and light to thee are both alike.
12 For my reins are thine; thou hast covered me in my mother's womb.
13 I will give thanks unto thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well.
14 My bones are not hid from thee, though I be made secretly, and fashioned beneath in the earth.
15 Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book were all my members written;
16 Which day by day were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.
17 How dear are thy counsels unto me, O God; O how great is the sum of them!
18 If I tell them, they are more in number than the sand: when I wake up, I am present with thee.
19 Wilt thou not slay the wicked, O God? Depart from me, ye blood-thirsty men.
20 For they speak unrighteously against thee; and thine enemies take thy Name in vain.
21 Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee?
22 Yea, I hate them right sore; even as though they were mine enemies.
23 Try me, O God, and seek the ground of my heart; prove me, and examine my thoughts.
24 Look well if there be any way of wickedness in me; and lead me in the way everlasting.

Psalm 139 is surely among the most wonderful depictions of the intimacy of God's love for the believer. It is an almost embarrassing familiarity, a love that knows all, and one that leaves us absolutely no place to which we can run and hide, should we wish to escape such ardent affection. It is the kind of relentless, persistent, all-penetrating love that surely leads to the ultimate surrender of the beloved. There is no room in such a portrait for the idea of an austere, aloof, paternalistic deity, ready to punish for the least infraction. This love is deeply personal. It is also not blind, for it takes into view the weaknesses, failures, and self-afflicted miseries of the beloved, and yet does so without passing judgment.

Basically, the text addresses that which constitutes the deepest longing of every creature made in the image of God: to be needed, desired, cherished, and especially, to be *known*. That is the principal issue. To be known. This is precisely the point of failure in the vast array of human

relationships which is the fountainhead of so much disappointment, hurt, and schism. We long to be known, to be understood, to be accepted, to be *heard*, and we strive for such deep connectedness on all levels. How often do we witness the words: “You don’t understand me. You’re not listening to me. You missed my meaning entirely.” How all too commonly do we hear such exasperated expressions as, “You’re not interested in me.” How many of our great efforts in life are made simply to somehow capture the attention of a loved one, or of friends, or of just *anyone*. In that sense, we all still retain that childlike but fundamental need to simply *be noticed*.

Only the Holy Scriptures use this very verb --*to know*-- in such a unique and mysterious application when describing the physical intimacy of the marriage relationship. The divine purpose of marriage is to emulate this romance that the Creator initiates toward the created. Within the confines of “marital bliss” --for that is surely the way God intended it-- a man and a woman are to know each other as thoroughly and fully as possibility allows, and in doing so to apprehend that fulfillment which is the end of all longing.

On the creaturely level, this state of relationship can even at best can only be approximated and approached. We are, after all, still living “in the flesh”, and thus in a frustratingly profound sense are kept from partaking of one another in that manner which which will only be realizable in the eternal state. But today’s Psalm reveals a level of love that God enjoys toward His beloved, even in this present state. It will serve us very well to examine it. There is a very real sense in which it is strangely flattering to be so loved and cherished.

It is a love that is all-accepting. It does not excuse sin, or willfulness, or rebellion, so it is not a love that *spoils*. It is a love that takes into account the limitations of the beloved, and so it is very kind. It is optimistic, always hoping for and expecting the best, and always working toward that ideal to bring it to pass. And so it is active and engaging, not content to just sit back and observe. It turns the pencil-scratching and scribbling of a toddler into the paintings of a Michelangelo. It transforms inarticulate muttering into beautiful prose. It accepts baby-steps as mighty acts of self-sacrifice.

The Psalmist desperately tries to escape this divine passion. Like all of us, he would rather nurse his sorrows, doubts, and self-pity in some private little hiding place, all by himself. “*Leave me alone!*” one can almost imagine him crying. “Let me be! I’ll never be what You want me to be. Why don’t You just give up on me and go away?!” But this is a wish that will never be granted.

God has, after all, a *right* to love us. He made us. He fashioned us, and, according to the psalmist, is the one responsible for our particularities (our peculiarities!), the very ones which often seem to drive us crazy: our shyness, or our boldness; our stature, whether too tall, or too short; the length of our noses and ears; our tendency to excessive sensitivity, or to apparent inability to have anything to say. All of these, in some indescribable way, are part of the Creator's handiwork. It is only sin, and the devil's work, and the myriad influences of a fallen world, that have ruined these proclivities, and turned them from blessings into curses, and distorted their purpose. It is the intention of the Divine Lover to thoroughly recover and redeem that which He created and for which He died.

How can it be that I existed in some fashion in the mind of God before I was even created? Can such a thing be so? What else can we cry other than: *Such knowledge is too wonderful and excellent for me; I cannot attain unto it.*

If God is really as intimately involved with our lives as this Psalm portrays, then we cannot help but declare: *How dear are thy counsels unto me, O God; O how great is the sum of them! If I tell them, they are more in number than the sand.* This is saying, in essence, that God is making use of every element that constitutes the story of our lives toward the achievement of a transcendent end: our reconstruction into one capable of "glorifying God and enjoying Him forever", in the famous words of the Westminster Catechism.

Note the utter change of tone in vv. 19-22. These verses are often omitted when this Psalm is referred to. But perhaps we can identify with the writer. To be so adored by Another, and to finally realize it, provokes a righteous anger against any and all who would spurn such a love, and treat it with contempt. Although the terms he uses seem extreme to us, can we not share in an expressed indignation for a wicked world which trashes that which is of the greatest value? Our own nation is despising its multiplied blessings and God-given heritage with the same scorn and indifference.

The last two verses describe the only correct reaction to the revelation so graciously given to the psalmist:

*Try me, O God, and seek the ground of my heart; prove me, and examine my thoughts.
Look well if there be any way of wickedness in me; and lead me in the way everlasting.*

In other words, "In the face of love of such quality and character, I beg of Thee, Lord, remove from me everything which is contrary to Thee. What else can I offer Thee? I am utterly ashamed

of the presence of anything within me that could be an affront to such love. Do not spare me. Let no stone within me remain unturned. Convert all that I am to this very end.”

Let us pray:

“Lord, I am wounded in so many ways. I have done my best to hide away behind a self-protective wall of aloofness and remoteness from Thee, and from all others. I fear the intimacy that Thou seem to desire with me. I doubt Thy unconditional love. But please do not give up on me. Work with me, and win the match, even if I often oppose Thee. For this I will give Thee all the thanks and praise. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.