

Sermon 23.10.01

Kate Heinzl, UMC pastor

Psalm 139: 1-18

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 my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways . Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely.

You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me . Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.

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, and your right hand shall hold me fast.

If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and night wraps itself around me," even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.

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

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.

My frame was not hidden from you when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes beheld my unformed substance . In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them yet existed.

How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! I try to count them—they are more than the sand; I come to the end—I am still with you.

Sermon

“I’m not sure what I believe anymore”, that’s a question I’ve heard from several in our midst.

Makes me wonder - How does what we believe shape us?

What do we do when we’re not sure, when those beliefs that helped us grow tall and bear good fruit suddenly feel uprooted?

Living in uncertainty is hard - Our work is to stay connected, stay with the questions, to be open to new answers, to hold the space of not knowing.

Our scripture today is one of such certainty - an intimate knowing and solid belief in the ever-present reality of God, even in moments of deepest darkness.

Over and over, there’s the intimacy of “I” and “You”. Walter Brueggemann describes this relationship by saying, “The Psalms are *prayers addressed to a known, named, identifiable You.*”¹

The close relationship between the psalmist and God is not only emphasized in all the “I”s and “Yous”, but also in the repetition of the Hebrew word *yada*’ (to know). *Yada* is a rich word covering a whole range of meanings – from simple recognition to intimate sexual relationship. In Genesis 4, we read that Adam “knew (*yada*) his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain” (Genesis 4:1). Elsewhere, God tells the people they will “know that I am the LORD” (Ezekiel 6:7, 13).

Sixty times, some form of this word shows up in the Psalms. “Knowledge” is a critical element of meaningful relationship.

We are to know God, just as God knows us - “you have searched me and known me...and are acquainted with all my ways.”

Knowing is different from believing -

believing is the state of mind where we can choose whether or not to accept what we’re told - what we hear or read. We may hear on the radio that there is a five mile backup on Route 80. But until we experience it for ourselves, we don’t know it.

Believing is holding an opinion. Knowing is to have direct experience.

Kate Bowler teaches theology at Duke Divinity school, writes books and hosts the podcast ‘Everything happens’. She writes she has a single mission: giving you permission to feel human. She was diagnosed with stage 4 cancer at the age of 35, and now, after years of being told her cancer was incurable, she was declared cancer-free. She is forever changed by what she discovered: life is so beautiful and life is so hard. For everyone.

¹ [Commentary on Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18 - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary](#)

In a recent podcast², Kate talked about a hospital stay shortly after her diagnosis - when what she believed, what had sustained her, was crumbling -

when being an earner/striver didn't work any longer - when she felt so angry, so broken - she also realized she felt so loved by God. It was hard to describe. It was hard to talk about. Didn't mean she wasn't unbelievably angry, but she felt cherished. Cherished in her one life.

She felt that she didn't even know who she was anymore - except the one hook she could hang onto was the knowledge that she was loved.

For so long, she'd felt worthless by the medical community - now - to feel loved, by God, was an unexpected gift.

To know she was loved - that was pure gift.

I lost so much language for prayer when I lost certainty, Kate says.

I needed a gentler, more elastic language. I found it in blessing. In a blessing you can re-order your spiritual world....if we can learn to put things in their place - fear, hope, desire - if we can put them in a spiritual order, especially when our lives are entirely out of order, then maybe we have more language to be cracked open to each other... and then, I think, to love."

Our psalm today feels like a blessing - a blessing by one who has been cracked open, and come to know they are loved - no matter what they say or where they find themselves.

Maybe you're lost some certainty - there's plenty of room for that in this journey we walk together. That's part of what it means to be community.

I want to end with part of one of Kate's blessings. From: *A blessing for a joyfully mediocre journey*³

Blessed are you who need a gentle reminder that
even now, even today,
God is here, and somehow,
that is good enough.

God is here - and somehow, that is enough.

² [On Being: Krista Tippett conversation with Kate Bowler](#)

³ Bowler, Kate and Richie, Jessica. 2022. *Good Enough: 40ish devotionals for a life of imperfection*. Convergent Books.

Welcoming new members

Sometimes we know that deep in our bones - sometimes we need others - need a community to remind us of that knowing that God is here, and that's enough.

We need one another. In our times of struggle, when we feel broken - we need those who are well rooted, who know; know what it is to be broken and know what it is to be held, no matter what.

Today we have the joy of welcoming 4 new members -

Membership is a commitment - to God, to one another, and to the mission of healing this broken world.

Membership at UMC is about belonging - belonging to this community of seekers. Supporting one another as we seek God and the kingdom, here in our midst.

We are the church. No matter if you've made a formal commitment to be a member, **YOU ARE THE CHURCH**. WE are the body, together - with varied gifts.

And so we celebrate together -

TURN TO # 959 in VT

(service continued with welcoming new members and communion)