**Sermon for July 19th 2020**

I believe we could easily skip the sermon this week and replace it with a slow, thoughtful re-read of Psalm 139 and then Romans 8. I won’t skip the sermon because I love preaching but these readings really are so wonderful that to speak for themselves. And a spoiler alert here, next week we read the end of Romans chapter eight and it contains arguably the most powerful statement of faith ever written. But let’s leave that for next week.

Last Sunday we focused on God’s promise, that His Word, once issued, will always accomplish its purpose. I took this promise and suggested that in it we can set our hope because all of creation is God’s word and Jesus is God’s living word and that through Jesus all creation will come to its ultimate purpose. These are big picture promises that are worth setting our hope in.

This week our scripture takes us from the universal to the specific, from the big picture to an intimate one, from a promise of God at work in all of creation to a consideration of God at work in you. Today I hear scripture speaking about you. Not the person beside you, not your family, not the church but you, your heart and your soul.

The psalmist writes, “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;”

Are you kidding me? God knows my thoughts, my words before I say them (I often don’t know my own words until they’re out!). He hems me in from behind and before. (embraces, if you like) behind and before. Every molecule, the firing of every synapse, my thoughts, words and actions; those I’ve done, those at play now and those still on my horizon. Our eternal Mother knows them! This is complete intimacy. No wonder the psalmist concludes by saying, “such knowledge is too wonderful for me” How can any of us wrap our head around this? The implications are staggering.

Do you ever get those moments where you feel just a bit like a fraud? You know those times when you think “If he or she only knew what I *really* think or feel they sure would have a different view of me?” Well, today we hear that God really does know you; better actually than you know yourself. He knows the best you and the very worst you can be.

And His response to you, as a package, is a love you can’t even imagine! His response to you; warts, flaws, fears and all was to send his Son into creation, into this life and this world of hurt in order to take you by the hand and bring you home.

Oh sure, last week we were reminded that God is redeeming all of creation but this week, this week I’m hearing God say he did it all for you. And he knows exactly what he’s doing and exactly who he’s doing it for!

My God, what a thought; The eternal and almighty life force knows me completely, me! And still eagerly has his hand held out to me. How on earth do I process this thought? How do I respond?

Well, if you’ve been listening to me preach this last year you probably know where I’m going with this. Anyway, give me a few more minutes to get to my usual finish.

Last week we heard Paul say we can live this segment of our life journey in the flesh or in the spirit but it is things of the spirit that are eternal. This week we continue where he left off and he goes on to say,” When we cry, "Abba! Father!"
 it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God,” When we turn to God, when we say ‘Abba, Father’ or if you’re me its typically less poetic and sounds more like “O God!” well, as we make that shift toward the divine, that is actually the Spirit of God, joining ours leading us to the knowledge that we are ‘children of God’ This is another one of those, “Are you kidding me?” moments.

Even as, from time to time I am able to lift my eyes in prayer to eternity and love it is the Spirit of eternity and love that lead me to do so!

What comes to mind with this thought are the Norwegian Fiord pilots. Some of Norway’s seaports are at the end of long narrow fiords so when an ocean going ship gets to Norway the port authority sends one of their pilots out to the ship to take the controls and steer in into port. When we pray it is actually the Holy Spirit coming to us to lead our spirit to Him!

Think of what these two thoughts taken together mean. There’s a book we could write as we reflect here but let’s starts, say, with prayer. If God knows your thoughts before you have them and your words before they occur to you, if your very turning in God’s direction is Her Spirit active within you well *what* do you need to pray?

Are you going to ask God for what you want or need? He knows better than you do.

Are you going to confess specific sins of thought word or deed? Really! To the omniscient one?

Are you going to tell God you’re scared or anxious or in love or lonely? He knows. He cares powerfully and deeply and wants the best for you but he knows Already.

Does this mean our prayers have no point? If, in presenting myself before God none of my words are new, why say them? Two quick thoughts here; one is that there is value in saying important things to people that already know them. There is value, in saying sorry to a friend or loved one even if they already know we’re sorry. There is value in saying “I love you” to the people that already know we love them. In saying something we claim it fresh, we own it and we amplify it.

The second thought also comes from one of the Psalmists who wrote “Be still and know that I am God.(Ps. 46)” I believe far more important than *what* we pray is *that* we pray. Just quieting ourselves and consciously coming before God in an attitude of prayer is prayer.

It is the coming before the divine that is all important, not what you’ll say or what you bring or what you’ll do in God’s presence. It’s about the turning and the facing. In truth, the less we feel we have to bring to prayer the more we are able to receive from prayer. In a reflection last week Richard Rohr wrote, “We settle for saying prayer instead of being prayer”. And as Paul says even as we say Abba Father, the Spirit of God is supporting and guiding us.

Our faith journey is really about trusting God enough to enter into relationship with God. This is why we were made and it is why Jesus came to be with us so that we might arrive at a place where we are open to and desirous of a relationship with the divine.

As each of us, in our time, turns towards God we do so in Hope. Hope that all will be as promised; hope for healing and love and eternity. As we turn ourselves to God in quiet hope, we begin to realize that God is already here. Prayer is not invoking the divine presence, love, protection and guidance but prayer is the process of becoming aware that all these things are, as always, already present.

So what then is our response to the knowledge that God knows and loves us, thoroughly and completely? It is, as Saint Paul says, to allow God the Holy Spirit to lead our spirit into His presence. This is what God ultimately wants from each of us, this is exactly what God wants from you. For it is in coming present to God that you will receive forgiveness for those sins I suggested you don’t really need to list. In coming present to God you will receive strength when you just don’t have the energy, you will find encouragement when the task looks too daunting and in coming quietly present to God you will feel the flood of love that is ever flowing between the three persons of the Trinity.

And I’ll finish with this reminder. When you allow yourself to come present to God and you permit yourself to receive His blessings you will find that each of those blessings is inexhaustible. The forgiveness you receive you can hold onto and use it to forgive, well, you know who needs forgiving. The energy you receive stays robust within you so you can pour in into the next person you meet that is having a moment of weakness. With God’s encouragement you can encourage the people around you and with the in-flow of God’s love you can love the people you meet today.

How does God want you to respond to Him he wants you to draw present *to* Him until the day dawns when you will be present *with* Him. Amen