

Nowhere to Hide – Part 2

Psalm 139

March 29, 2020

In our Psalm today the writer reminds us that there is nowhere to hide from God. Today, as we live under the covid19 pandemic threat this Psalm has some very assuring and comforting words. Yes, even today, whether we are keeping our families safe at home, or you are looking after others, or sitting alone with your thoughts, God is fully aware of our situation. The Psalmist says: *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.*

It also contains a challenge to our faith. The Psalmist reminds us: *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it. And again: 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.*

In short, he has a hard time getting his head around this idea of an ever-present God. The truth that God knows my thoughts, knows my body intimately, knows my beginning and end, and knows my innermost fears and doubts: this is challenging as well as amazing!

But it's not only God we hide from. Sometimes we hide from one another. Sometimes our public masks hide us completely from our neighbor. Yes, even from our closest relationships.

Many of you probably saw the film **A Beautiful Mind (2001)**, the story of John Nash a brilliant mathematician at Princeton University whose inner world became a nightmarish journey into delusion and hallucination. He believed that he was finding messages sent to him through television or newspapers, a skewed view of reality leading to paranoia. All of this is unknown to his wife Alicia. He had believed he was working for the government decoding secret messages and had kept all this from her. A breakdown occurs and he is taken into psychiatric hospital where his wife begins to learn the truth about her husband.

There is a particularly poignant moment in the film when she goes to his office with his two colleagues. There she finds his office walls covered with newspaper and magazine clippings. She asks if this is all he has been doing at work. They tell her about the secret packages he has been delivering to a deserted home and dropping into the mail box. She goes there and discovers all the packages unopened. The truth about her husband's delusions is hard for her to believe and bear. But now she has the proof.

So, we can hide from one another, but not from God. And God's intimate knowledge of us, and his delight in our physical creation, ought to challenge some of Western Christianity's negativity toward our physical body. We often mistakenly think that a Christian is one who is supposed to denigrate the body, avoid passion, but aspire to be spiritual at the expense of being embodied creations. Hollywood portrays Christianity like that all the time in the movies and television. On the contrary, this Psalm teaches us that knowing God intimately and being known puts us on a path to full, passionate, humanity. Faith doesn't reduce us to a pale imitation of humanity; it enlivens and gives purpose and direction to our lives.

Celtic spirituality expresses this truth well. In a little book, ***Sounds of the Eternal: a Celtic Psalter***, I read this prayer offered for a Tuesday morning in the Psalter:

Thanks be to you, O God, for the stirrings of new life in me this day, for rising from the dreams of the night, to a fresh flowing of energy, for the vitality that awakened my body and the desires that stir my soul. Let me know the power of life within me, the life-force that is in my senses and the might that is in my heart.

This prayer reminds us that to be truly human and in a relationship with God through Jesus doesn't reduce our passion, play down our body, or squelch our desires. Moreover, a relationship like the one described in this Psalm can never be bland. It cannot passively sit on the cutting issues of our day and remain neutral. To know this God and be known by him affects my life at the very deepest level. Knowing God's care for his truest, deepest self, moves this Psalmist to praise and prayer.

He closes: *Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

May it be true for us during this Lenten season that we are open to God's knowledge of each one of us, a knowing that never shrinks from loving us completely and unreservedly.

Amen