

Pentecost 10A Sermon 072008  
Genesis 28:10-19a; Psalm 139: 1-11, 22-23  
Romans 8:12-25; Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

In the name of one God, Father, Son & Holy Spirit, Amen.

Psalm 139 (a portion of which, we just read) is about God's knowledge of and relationship with us, as individuals. The message is: God knows all about each one of us. To give you an idea of the depth and breadth of God's knowledge of us, a small-town prosecuting attorney called his first witness to the stand in his first trial. She was a grandmotherly woman. He approached her and asked, "Mrs. Jones, do you know me?"

She responded, "Why, yes, I do know you, Mr. Williams. I've known you since you were a young boy. And frankly, you've been a big disappointment to me. You lie, you cheat on your wife. You manipulate people and talk about them behind their backs. You think you're a big shot when you haven't got the brains to realize you never will amount to anything more than a two-bit paper pusher. Yes, I do know you."

The lawyer was stunned. Not knowing what else to do he pointed across the room and asked, "Mrs. Williams, do you know the defense attorney?"

She again replied, "Why, yes I do. I've known Mr. Bradley since he was a youngster, too. I used to babysit him for his parents. And he, too, has been a real disappointment to me. He's lazy, bigoted, he has a drinking problem. The man can't build a normal relationship with anyone and his law practice is one of the shoddiest in the entire state. Yes, I know him."

At this point, the judge rapped his gavel on the bench and called both lawyers forward. In a very quiet voice, he said with menace, “If either of you asks her if she knows me, I’ll jail you for contempt!”

- 1 LORD, you have searched me out and known me; \*  
you know my sitting down and my rising up;  
you discern my thoughts from afar.
- 2  
You trace my journeys and my resting-places \*  
and are acquainted with all my ways.
- 3  
Indeed, there is not a word on my lips, \*  
but you, O LORD, know it altogether

Frankly, my brothers and sisters, like the judge in the story, I’ve drawn more comfort from other aspects of God’s being.

I do love Psalm 139, though. It really is one of my favorites. But it can bring some disquiet to me to think that God knows **me** so well that every one of my thoughts is known. Every word to come out of my mouth is known – **before** I say it. Every **way** that I have is known before I go there. Now I’ve been some places I shouldn’t have gone. And I’ve said some things I shouldn’t have said. And I most certainly have **thought** some things that I should not have thought – some even this morning. And God knew every one of them before **I** did. That could be frightening. **But** ... that fear in me is removed by the knowledge of the love of God as expressed through Jesus Christ.

As St. Paul tells us in this morning’s reading from Romans, “When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ it is (the Holy Spirit affirming) that we are children of God, and if children, then

heirs, ... of God ....” That word, “Abba,” that Paul uses is the same one Jesus often used to refer to God. The word is Aramaic for “father,” but some scholars say that it more accurately translates to “daddy,” the most intimate way to express the relationship between father and child. Paul wants us to understand that through Jesus we were **all** adopted as children of our heavenly daddy. That changes the fearful nature of the opening of Psalm 139 considerably.

You see, I **know** my children. I may not know every thought they have or every word they say before they say it – but I can accurately predict them more often than not. I **know** my children ... and I love them anyway. If that is true of me, the most imperfect of fathers, how much more must that love be true of the perfect Father in heaven?

There is no need for us to be afraid of the fact that God knows us so well that there is nothing we can hide from God. After all, this is the same God we heard from this morning in Genesis, when Jacob was running away from his brother Esau after stealing Esau’s inheritance. Jacob fled from the anger of his brother, finally laid down to go to sleep and in his dream spoke with God, who said, “Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go.” In other words, here you go – you swindler, you con man, you thief – know that I am with you and I will be by your side on your journey.”

That affirmation of Jacob is wonderfully supportive to us – after all, if God loved and supported Jacob, in the wake of him tricking his father and stealing from his brother, we’re in good shape, no matter what we do, right? We can lie, cheat and steal with

impunity, because God already knows us and loves us anyway. Well, maybe Jacob's not the perfect example for us.

You see, Jacob was doing what God had told him to do when he "stole" Esau's birthright. Esau had originally taken what was supposed to be Jacob's by overpowering Jacob in the womb and coming out as the first born, the heir. God was merely putting things back in order and making a prophesy to Rebekah come true by having her second-born, Jacob buy what was Esau's from him and then trick his old and blind father into giving him the inheritance.

But more importantly, St. Paul says at the beginning of this Romans passage, "Brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh ...." He is talking there about the need for us to rise above our base, human nature or the desires of our flesh. We need to rise above our desire to get ahead by cheating, to do those things we know to be wrong, not because God won't love us anymore if we do them, but precisely **because** God will always love us.

God has shown that we will always have God's unconditional love. So shouldn't we spend the entirety of our lives trying to live up to – and into – that amazing gift of love?

In the verses of Psalm 139 that were left out of our reading this morning, the psalmist says, "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."

God, indeed knows each of us – more intimately than did the parents who fed, bathed, and changed us before we were able to care for ourselves. And God loves us with a love that we can only imagine from our knowledge of parental love here on earth – that love that is exhibited by complete knowledge of our shortcomings and still being willing to give up Jesus to death on our behalf.

How should we repay a God who has exhibited, and continues to exhibit such love for us? What can we, in our infinitesimal way, do to show the Creator of the entire world how much we recognize and appreciate the love that has been lavished on us? One word ... Acknowledgement.

The psalmist says, “I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” “I **praise you,**” in other words, I give you **glory** for the way you made me, warts and all. I have read commentators who have said that this line can be interpreted as an indictment of, for instance, the cosmetic surgery industry and all of the people who spend their fortunes trying to make their outward appearance “perfect,” whatever that might mean. That’s certainly one reading of this part of the Psalm. However, when taken as a whole, I think it means that we should glorify God in every way we can, by **all** that we say and do. In other words, the way we can glorify God is by glorifying our lives. We can make God “proud” of us by doing and being the best we can be – in **every** aspect of our lives.

God made each of us as we are – wonderfully. And in return – we should love God the way our Creator, our Daddy, should be loved. Would you like to know how to

love God, how to glorify God through the way you live life? Watch Taylor, or many other children with Down Syndrome. Taylor only knows how to love – she has no concept of hate. Everybody can be her friend, and she doesn't know the word enemy. She doesn't know time, so she lives in this moment, not worried about the future or the past. She doesn't own anything. If you want something that is hers, she'll give it to you. (It may take her a while to part with some things – like her beat up old doll – but if you wanted it and asked her just right, she'd give it to you.) Taylor doesn't talk bad about anybody. Neither does she try to impress a soul, she just lives life for the sheer joy of it. Sometimes, just spinning in the middle of the floor makes the day simply perfect. And while I don't know Taylor's thoughts as well as know her brother's and her sister's, I'll bet you anything that God likes Taylor's thoughts better than God usually likes mine. She praises God every day for the way she was made, just by being the best Taylor she can be – no matter what the circumstances may be.

We'll never earn the love God has shown us in our creation and continued lives. But occasionally we might try saying thank you to God, just by living God's way – loving, giving, caring and being gracious, like God.

Amen.