

Faith Mennonite Church  
June 30, 2013 - God's Good Creation  
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Known by God...knowing God  
*Psalm 139:1-18*

Often, when we speak of creation, the images that come to mind are landscapes—a pristine mountain stream, the rolling prairies, a dense forest, the calm or the storm in a remote area of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. And the creatures we imagine are the animals...deer, elk, cattle, sheep, hawks and loons. But we don't always imagine ourselves within these images, as part and parcel of creation. We speak of "creation care" as if we humans are somehow outside of creation, off-stage directing but not in the actual play.

But the Genesis accounts that we heard earlier this summer place us humans fully within creation, part of the natural order. We may have an inordinate effect on creation, distinct from other sentient beings, but we too, are affected by the whole; we cannot escape; we have no other home.

Our scripture today, Psalm 139, is a beautiful reflection on our place within creation and particularly our relationship with Creator God. The psalmist writes out of profound sense of vulnerability, of being fully known by the God who makes us. I read this Psalm this week with different eyes and a different heart, having spent last weekend driving across the plains of South Dakota, through the northeastern corner of Wyoming and then into the southeastern part of Montana where we were hosted by the Mennonite churches located on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation for our Central Plains Conference annual meeting. During most of our 13 hours of driving each way, we were in wide-open country. The horizon stretched out as far as we could see in any direction. It was hard to imagine how one hides in such a place—to take shelter from a storm, or to run from one's enemies (should one have any to be running from!).

I wonder if the psalmist lived in such an expansive setting, if his experience of God was shaped by his geography. Terry LeBlanc, an indigenous Canadian theologian who spoke at the Central Plains Conference annual meeting described to us an indigenous world view in which the spiritual and the physical world are deeply interconnected. He told a story, comparing two travelers who went out to explore the world: one was largely silent, observing, occasionally asking a question, then retreating to listen and reflect. The other was full of words, constantly describing what he was seeing, asking questions but not really listening for answers outside of himself. The first was embedded within the world she explored and had an expectation of hearing the Spirit from within creation. The other approached the world as if it were something other, apart from who he was. He found it hard to hear any voices beyond his own rational thoughts.

Psalm 139 gives voice to one who has a sense of being imbedded in God, imbedded in creation. This sense of imbeddedness, of being "hemmed in, behind and before," with God's very hand upon him, is not oppressive, not claustrophobic, or fear-inducing, but reassuring, awe-inspiring. "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me...I cannot attain it" (6). The psalmist acknowledges God's presence everywhere—as far as he can imagine traveling or climbing, as a person or a bird in flight. God's presence is even in the dark of night; there is nothing to fear. A modern version of this verse about darkness is painted on a mural on a building that one sees

when traveling west on 38th Street in south Minneapolis. It says "There is nothing present in the darkness that is not present in the light."

Being embedded in creation, intimately known by the Creator, provides the psalmist with a profound sense of self-worth: "I am fearfully and wonderfully made." In one instance he writes of being knit together in his mother's womb. In another instance he is woven together in depths of the earth, a creature of God's image in the soil that Phil Stoltzfus preached about several weeks ago.

Each of us is fearfully and wonderfully made, in all of our particularities, with each of our abilities and disabilities, our beauty and our disfiguration, our resilience and our wounds. God knows all of this. God loves the entirety of each of us. If there is something in ourselves, some habit, some action, some recurring thought that distresses us, we can be sure that it distresses God. But not in a way that would shame or punish us, but in a way that would honor and free and heal and make us even more beautiful, more grounded in creation.

And how does that happen? Not so much by trying to fix ourselves—although self-understanding and practicing new patterns are certainly important. But the route of the psalmist is different. Rather than focusing on *self* he seeks to *know God* with the same deliberateness with which God has searched us.

*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. (17-18)*

We humans in the West spend a lot of time focusing on ourselves, on our passions and comforts, our faults and shortcomings. We're quite good at obsessing about or trying to cover up what we'd rather not have seen by others or God. But the Psalmist takes a different approach: he looks toward God, the creator, the one who sees and loves us completely. He searches that goodness, that wonder, that mystery.

Terry LeBlanc told another story, of this search for God. Understanding God, he said, is like climbing ever larger hills. We begin to climb and explore and just as we think we're beginning to understand the wonder of God as we reach a summit, there we behold another, larger hill before us. And so we set off to climb that one, and again, reaching the summit, another hill, higher yet, comes into view. And on and on. We will never, we can never understand the complete mystery of God. Yet seeking God, following Jesus who was incarnate God on earth, listening for the Spirit as we read scripture alone and together, moves us ever deeper into the heart of creation, moves us toward God and toward one another, our fellow travelers on the road of faith.

We are fully known by God. May we grow in our knowing God.

Reflection:

- 1) How am I fearfully and wonderfully made? (What can I affirm about myself as part of creation?)
- 2) What is one aspect of the mystery of God you have come to know?

