

Epiphany 2 (B)
Pastor Ed Harkey

Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18¹
TLC, Keene, NH

FULLY KNOWN

“Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.”

“Lord, You know me. Let me know You. Let me come to know You even as I am known. You are the strength of my soul; enter it and make it a place suitable for Your dwelling, a possession ‘without spot or blemish.’ This is my hope and the reason I speak. In this hope I rejoice, when I rejoice rightly. Amen.”

- Augustine

“Before we know or name God, God knows and names us.”

[Allen McSween, *Feasting on the Word*, B, 248]

“Give heed, therefore, to yourself,’ that you may give heed to God, to whom be glory and power forever and ever. Amen.” - Basil

Introduction

“Who am I? They often tell me
I would step from my cell’s confinement
calmly, cheerfully, firmly,
like a squire from his country – house.”

Such is the opening verse of a poem, written by Dietrich Bonhoefer, just days before he was executed for his part in a plot to assassinate Adolph Hitler. It’s a poem that captures well the thoughts of many – at various stages in life – as they sometimes are brought to question their purpose or meaning in this world.

“Who am I? [Bonhoeffer continues.] They also tell me
I would bear the days of misfortune
equably, smilingly, proudly,
like one accustomed to win.”

Where, sometimes we do – win – but at times we don’t, and so we are brought to wrestle – at times intensely – with circumstances and situations in our lives, many beyond our control.

Who are we? What is our purpose?

¹ 1 Samuel 3:1-10; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20; John 1:43-51

David brings us this morning to a partial resolution. In one of the most beloved of Psalms, we are reassured by God's Word as to who and whose we are.

Wherein ...

Main Thought: "Because the God who knows us thoroughly loves us fully, our lives have a worth that cannot be taken from us – by others or ourselves." [McSween, *Feasting on the Word*, B, 252]

FULLY KNOWN BY THE LORD, SEEK FULLY TO KNOW THE LORD²
Amen.

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[1] GOD KNOWS EVERYTHING:

¹ O LORD, you have searched me and known me! ² You know [as "Adam knew his wife Eve"] **when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. ³ You search** ["sift out" as in winnowing³] **out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. ⁴ Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. ⁵ You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. ⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.**

If there is anything this Word from the Lord brings us to, it is first to the awe-filled and beautiful certainty that God knows us so intimately through and through.

Wherein, such knowledge has one of two effects in our lives:

It could terrify ...

Not unlike the taxi cab driver who almost wrecked his cab, when the passenger in the back tapped him on the shoulder to ask him a question.

² Thought, Word & Deed

³ Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 464

With the passenger completely apologetic for startling the cab driver, it was the cab driver who responded, “No, no, I should apologize to you. You see today is my first day driving cabs, where for the last 25 years, I’ve just been driving hearses.”

God’s knowledge of us shocks us to our senses. It quickly brings about the gulf that exists between us and a holy God. Ask Jonah! Or any who have come face-to-face with the holiness of the Lord!

But, “if you wish to flee *from* Him, flee *to* Him!” says St. Augustine, “For you cannot hide, but you can confess. Say to Him, ‘You are my refuge,’ and let love be nurtured in you, which alone leads to life.” [*Homilies on 1 John* 6.3.2]

Wherein, it is such terror that drives us to the one place that offers the holy remedy, the healing balm, bringing us to a second response to David’s Word:

To comfort ...

Yes ...

“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly ... and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double [blessing] for all her sins.”

[Isaiah 40:1-2; see also Isaiah 61:1-3]

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.” [2 Corinthians 2:3-4; see also 1 Thess. 2:16-17]

Yes, child of God, rejoice ...

[2] WHEREIN, WITH SUCH an intimate KNOWLEDGE of us, even our sin, OUR LORD does not run from us, but rather] CHOOSES TO BE PRESENT WITH US ... NO MATTER WHERE WE MAY GO:

⁷ Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence [as attempted by Adam and Eve, or numerous children from their parents]? ***⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!*** ***⁹ If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,*** ***¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.*** ***¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,"*** ***¹² even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.***

One commentator calls vv. 7-12 ... "One of the summits of Old Testament poetry." [Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 464]

For herein is the blessed affirmation, echoed by St. Paul, that:

"That neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." [Romans 8:38-39]

Even though, we wrestle:

Again, Bonhoeffer:

"Am I then really all that which other men tell of?
Or am I only what I know of myself,
restless and longing and sick, like a bird in a cage,
struggling for breath, as though hands were compressing my
throat,
yearning for colours, for flowers, for the voices of birds,
thirsting for words of kindness, for neighbourliness,
trembling with anger at despotisms and petty humiliation,
tossing in expectation of great events,
powerlessly trembling for friends at an infinite distance,
weary and empty at praying, at thinking, at making,
faint, and ready to say farewell to it all?"

Wherein, we ourselves may wrestle with the same thoughts ...
need to hear the admonition of Eliphaz to Job:

“Are the comforts of God too small for you, or the word that deals gently with you? Why does your heart carry you away, and why do your eyes flash, that you turn your spirit against God and bring such words out of your mouth?” [Job 15:11-13]

Child of God, in the midst of such times, the Lord in His ever-seeking love and compassion seeks us still [Just read Richard Thompson’s “Hound of Heaven”].

Yes ...

“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.” [Matthew 10:29-31]

Or, our blessed Savior, once again:

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.” [John 10:27-28]

All to say:

We may forget Him, but God never forgets us.

Says Max Lucado in *The Devotional Study Bible*: “With God in your world, you aren’t an accident or an incident; you are a gift to the world, a divine work or art, signed by God.” [732a]

Where ...

[3] SUCH KNOWLEDGE OF & PRESENCE WITH US [while way too high and wonderful for us] INVITES OUR WORSHIP AND UNENDING SERVICE TO OUR GOD:

¹³ For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. ¹⁴ **I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.**

¹⁵ *My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven* [“suggesting the complex patterns and colours of the weaver or embroiderer”⁴] *in the depths of the earth.* ¹⁶ *Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.* ¹⁷ ***How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!*** ¹⁸ ***If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you.***

“Who has more reason to worship than the astronomer who has seen the stars? Than the surgeon who has held a heart? That the oceanographer who has pondered the depths?” [Lucado, “God’s Workmanship,” *The Devotional Bible*, 732a] The disciple of Jesus who has come to rejoice that her or his worth is made possible solely by the love of God in Christ Jesus ... the disciple that rejoices in his/her sins being forgiven ... the disciple whose worth is located at Calvary’s hill ... who even now may receive the fruits of the cross at His Table of grace.

“How do you know me?” Nathanael said to Jesus when they met. To which Jesus answered, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree [which some see as a reference to when Nathanael was but a child], I saw you.”

Why else Nathanael’s serendipitous and faith-filled response: *“Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”*

That’s what the knowledge that God has of us brings us to ... to worship ... and to a profound recognition of not only who God is, but who He has called us in grace to be.

Wherein, such knowledge of us also brings us to a lifelong service in the Savior’s name. To quote the rock group Switchfoot, *“We were meant to live for so much more.”*

⁴ Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 466

Where, being fully known by our Creator, and being brought in grace to know Him in the Savior, it's' *"the body ... for the Lord, and the Lord for the body,"* says St. Paul.

Where, to quote Switchfoot:

"We want more than this world's got to offer/We want more than this world's got to offer ... [where] everything inside screams for second life ... We were meant to live/We were meant to live."

Child of God, yes you were, and yes you are ... like David, who in cherishing the greater purposes of God led Him to an incredibly deep worship life; or like the disciples, who being known by their Savior – foibles and all – came to know a love of God that would turn the world upside down; or like Hannah, who knew the Lord so intimately through prayer, was blessed with her son Samuel, who himself came to cultivate a lifelong relationship with the Lord both in being known and knowing Him.

FULLY KNOWN BY THE LORD, they – like us – SEEK FULLY TO
KNOW THE LORD

Conclusion

George Bernard Shaw once wrote:

"This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one: then being thoroughly worn out before you are thrown on the scrap heap, and being a force of nature instead of a feverish selfish little clod of ailments and grievances, complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy." [Quoted by Johnston, in *You Can Stand Strong in the Face of Fear*, 1990 SP Publications, p. 171]

OR this from John Wesley and the view of his purpose in life:

"I want the whole Christ for my Savior, the whole Bible for my book, the whole Church for my fellowship, and the whole world for my mission field."

Wherein, “The value of our lives does not come from what we achieve or possess or what others may think of us. It comes from the God who knows and names us, from whose steadfast love nothing in all creation can ever separate us.” [McSween, 252]

Yes, thanks be to God for His intimate knowledge of His children ... a knowledge that brings Him to us still in the person of His Son, and in the means by which the Holy Spirit would seek to strengthen us today. It is this love of God in Christ that brings us to worship and serve Him all of our days.

Indeed, it is only God’s gracious knowledge of, and presence with us brings us to pray:

²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! ²⁴ And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

For ...

“Who am I? [Bonhoeffer concludes.]
They mock me, those lonely questions of mine.
Whoever I am, thou knowest, O God, I am Thine.”

Yes, you are, child of God. Yes, you *are*.

“In the name of the Father, and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit.”

Amen.