

Written Copy: Psalm 139:1-7, 17 “You Can’t Run or Hide from the Spirit”

Pentecost Sunday/Confirmation

Sunday, May 19th, 2024

Text: Psalm 139:1-7, 17

¹ O LORD, you have searched me and known me! ² You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. ³ You search 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. ⁷ Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? ¹⁷ How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!

Exegetical Statement

The LORD thoroughly and completely knows me body and soul. His hands were at work forming me in my mother’s womb blessing me with the gifts and talents He knew I would need to serve Him in His kingdom as His precious child, a member of His body, the Church. How precious am I? He knows where I am and what I’m doing no matter where I go. There is no place on earth where I am hidden from His protective presence. He knows completely not just the work of my hands and mouth but my thoughts and intentions. He knows my whole history, the past, present, and future, and He loves me anyway because I am completely forgiven by my faith in Christ. Because of this His thoughts and plans for me are precious and for my good now and into eternity. With that goal in mind His Spirit is at work to hem me in and protect me body, soul, and spirit from the temptations the world and the devil brings to bear on my heart, as well as his insinuations and accusations aimed at bringing me to despair and moving me to fall from grace by walking away from my faith in Christ. His Spirit working through the Gospel points to the LORD’s precious thoughts and love shown in Christ’s atoning sacrifice for me and the resurrection hope He keeps alive in me.

Focus Statement:

The LORD’s presence through His indwelling Spirit is a blessing. He calls us to faith and is always at work to keep us in faith no matter where we are or what we do. Christ atoning sacrifice forgives all our sins of past, present, and future. Because of Christ and our faith relationship created and maintained by the Spirit all the Father’s thoughts toward us are love, grace and forgiveness, and the expressed desire put into action by His Spirit to keep us steadfast in faith to life everlasting.

Function Statement:

Why it’s important to know:

Outside of a faith relationship with Christ the LORD’s all-knowing and seeing presence is scary and condemning. Even in our faith relationship we try to hide our sins by acting like everything is okay and dismissing them from our mind hoping He won’t see or remember. But the LORD knows all that we have said, done, and thought and will in the future.

What the hearer should do as a result:

For those who are outside a faith relationship with Christ God’s all-knowing constant presence is scary and condemning. But for those of us who are united to Christ by faith like a branch to a vine, His protective and forgiving presence at work through Word and Sacrament is the greatest blessing, protecting us from falling away, keep us in repentant faith so we remain close by His side unto life everlasting.

Subject Sentence: The Spirit is the hound of heaven to keep us in faith

Introduction

There was once a little boy who loved peanut butter very much. When he was 3 or 4 years old, he snuck into the kitchen when his father wasn't paying attention. He pulled the kitchen drawers out and made himself a make-shift ladder. He used that to climb up onto the kitchen counter and walked around the sink and over to where the cupboard was where the family kept the jar of peanut butter. He climbed back down with it in his hand. With the stealth that a ninja warrior would've been proud of he took the jar of peanut butter up the stairs to his room. And there he proceeded to have a blast. What did it mean for him to have a blast with a jar of peanut butter? Well, he not only stuck his hands into the jar and ate it off his fingers, but he smeared it all over his face and hands, into his hair, on his clothes, and of course onto the carpet in his room. Eventually his inattentive father noticed his absence in the living room and went to search the house for him. The smell of peanut butter helped lead him to the boy's room where he found him with the biggest smile on his face. A human ball of peanut butter smiling and laughing for the joy of it all. Of course, dad wasn't too happy looking at the mess, and even less happy as he cleaned peanut butter off the child and the floor before mom got home. And the boy wasn't happy for long either when his peanut butter was taken away and he had to have a bath. The father wanted to think his tears were caused by his understanding that what he did was wrong. But more than likely they stemmed from the fact that dad took his jar of peanut butter away before he was completely done with it.

Fathers left to babysit can sometimes be inattentive. But our LORD God is not. **Psalm 139:1-4** ¹ **O LORD, you have searched me and known me!** ² **You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar.** ³ **You search 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.** He knows you, the real you, not the you that you pretend to be around other people. He knows every action, word, and thought that you have. The knowledge, attentiveness, and presence of the LORD in our lives is mind blowing. It is beyond the ability of our finite minds to grasp. And this can cause one of two reactions in us, depending on what our relationship is with this ever-present all-knowing and all-seeing God.

The Conviction of God's All-Seeing/Knowing Presence

Let's look at those who live outside of a faith relationship with Jesus Christ. They make their life all about what pleases them and what is best for them. They don't like the idea of anyone telling them they're wrong. And if anyone points out that they've wronged another person they justify what they've done and how they live with "Not my problem, it's your problem." Or "It's not my fault! He or she or it made me do it". When life is all about you, and there is no higher authority to answer to, then you can re-write the rules as to what is right and wrong, good and bad, permissible and not permissible, according to what works for your will and your desires. And when you do cross over the line and do what you know to be wrong, you just put a positive spin on it, blame it on someone else, or you tell the truth, but just not the whole truth. You tell just enough of the truth so you come out looking pretty good.

The person who lives a life without faith doesn't want to hear about an all-knowing and all-seeing God. If they are looking for any kind of a god, it's a part-time one who they can sneak away from when they want to do what he might consider to be wrong. Or they want a god that can be manipulated by the spin they put on their actions. Or they want a god who is okay with some sinful selfish pleasure because "I'm good enough to earn a pass" Yet there may for whom will come a time, some dark hour of the night, that they might begin to wonder if indeed there are omniscient eyes watching them and disapproving of what they do. They might begin to wonder, if at no other time then on their death bed, if they really are good enough to receive a pass on anything wrong they may have done.

How about you and I who are in a faith relationship with the LORD? How does it make you feel to hear that He is always present and watching you whatever you do and wherever you go? How does it make you feel to know that even those things you've done that no one else knows about, He does. He knows about us better than we know ourselves because He sees us for who we really are and our deeds for what they really are according to our intentions, which are not always completely honorable. We too try to justify our wrongful thoughts, words, and actions by becoming the spin doctor. We put the best spin on it instead of calling it what it really is, which is sinful disobedience. We make all kinds of excuses like how it's because of our parents and our upbringing, or some other person who just kept egging me on, or it's because of my lack of sleep. We say to ourselves, "It's just the way I am, I can't help it."

When these things don't work, we push those thoughts, words, and actions from our minds and hide them in a dark closet. We think that if we don't think about them God won't notice them either. And after all, our friends and relatives don't know, they aren't condemning me, so it must be okay.

But the Holy Spirit was poured out on Pentecost, and into our hearts in our baptism to work on us through such words as this Psalm and apply them to our lives. He brings to our minds the truth that our LORD sees all that we've done and knows all that we were thinking when we did them. He knows even those things we were thinking about and considering doing and saying but never followed through on. He sees them not in the light of half-truth, or the spin that we put on them, or according to all our excuses that point the finger elsewhere. He is the Spirit of divine truth who sees and knows all truth and brings that truth to bear in our minds eye, showing us how we are called to love our LORD and others sacrificially and unconditionally and how we have failed miserably, with no excuse, no leg to stand on. And if that's as far as it goes, these verses can crush us.

How Faith Relationship with Christ Changes Perception

But how does our hearing of these words change when you read them in light of your faith relationship in Christ? What happens when the Holy Spirit turns you away from those feelings of despair to look at Jesus, your Savior? These words that once crushed you can instead bring you comfort.

That's how your Savior Jesus Christ wants you to read them as one connected to Him by faith as a branch is connected to the vine, a connection that brings His grace and love to bear on your crushed heart. He has known you and loved you since before you were born. This Psalm reveals that He formed and fashioned you in your mother's womb, giving you the gifts, talents, and attributes that would enable you to serve Him in His kingdom, the Church. He knew that He would call you into a faith relationship with Him and made sure it began in your baptism. He planned from the beginning to make you a precious child of the Heavenly Father.

He made you to be perfect. But the moment you were born sin took hold like a virus takes hold over a computer. The manufacturer designed the computer to work flawlessly but the virus makes it inefficient and causes it to do what they never intended it to do. That's what original sin does to us, changes us from His perfect creation into sinfully flawed people with hearts that love to serve ourselves before anyone else. But in Jesus Christ God the Father is at work to restore you to that perfection He created you to have.

You are still His precious and wonderfully made child. Christ came to be the atoning sacrifice that defeats sins hold on you. He took that sin from you and atoned for it in His life, death, and resurrection. You are no longer responsible for the guilt and punishment you deserve because of them; Christ took all that from you. In baptism your sins are washed onto Him and He took them and buried them in the grave, never to rise again. Through the faith that the Holy Spirit works in your heart, which creates that branch to vine connection, all Jesus' goodness and obedience flows into you and is credited to your account. When the Father looks at you, He no longer sees a virus riddled machine. Instead, He sees the precious and wonderful child He always intended you to be. He declares you to be that in faith.

Because sin keeps popping up in our lives, produced by the sinful selfish heart that still beats in all of us, The Holy Spirit was sent by the Father to dwell in us and remain in us. He points to our sinful actions by applying the words of Scripture to our life so that instead of hiding them in a closet or denying them we readily acknowledge them. At the same time, by the faith He works in our heart, we acknowledge that Jesus has taken the guilt and punishment that we deserve from us. We are completely forgiven for them. And in that wonderful news we can turn from them and back to our Heavenly Father, seeking once again to obey Him as that perfectly wonderfully made child He designed us to be. The Spirit continues this work in us every day through His Word and Sacrament as His work of love in us.

In Christ God's All-Seeing Knowing Presence Brings Comfort

Knowing that you are right with God, not because of what you have done, but because all Christ has done for you and given to you, you can now see these verses in a new light.

Psalms 139:5-7,17 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. ⁷ Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? ¹⁷ How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!

In Christ being hemmed in means being completely protected. His hand upon you means a fatherly hand of protection and guidance. It means that you will never be so far away from your Lord and Savior physically, emotionally, and spiritually that He doesn't see you, care for you, protect you, and minister to you. Living in Christ means you can never wander so far away from Him that He cannot call you back. His thoughts about you are precious because they are filled with His unconditional and sacrificial love. How vast is the sum of them? Beyond our complete comprehension this side of eternity. All this comes to you as His free gift of grace in your baptism, and is renewed and strengthened through His Word preached, read, and sung, and the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

Conclusion

In case you haven't already guessed, that young 4-year-old boy is my son Derek who is now almost 30 years old. He gave me permission to tell that story because he knows that I no longer hold it against him, and that all is forgiven. He no longer sees it as something bad or embarrassing but can laugh about it just as I can. He said he hopes everyone gets a chuckle out of it too. It's one of the precious thoughts I have about him growing up.

Because of your faith relationship with Jesus Christ as a branch to the vine, the Lord wants you to know His precious loving thoughts toward you. He sent His Spirit into your life to be that constant protecting presence that you need. He is present searching you, knowing your thoughts and actions so that the Spirit working through His Word can point out your sin, and then point to your Savior, and thus keep you in a repentant faith relationship, one that knows and confesses all your sins have been washed to the cross. A relationship that, powered by His gift of grace, moves you to joyful obedience loving Him and others. The Spirit has come to be present with you now, and live with you now, all the way to eternal life to come. Amen.