

Known By God

Psalm 139

September 8, 2019

First Presbyterian, Luling

Two Wednesdays ago, at the invitation of my Presbyterian colleague in La Grange, I joined the local pastors for a breakfast lectionary study at Hank's Express, a home-cooking kind of place in what looks to be a former fast-food restaurant building. I ordered at the counter and, when the waitress asked, told her my name. She wrote it on the bottom of my ticket. I missed the next Wednesday because...I don't remember. I had something to do. Then this week, I returned. The waitress recognized me, called me "sweetie," took my order and then *apologized* when she couldn't remember my name. I was a little startled. I hadn't expected her to remember me, much less my name. She said, "I'll get it soon enough, and then I'll remember your order."

This encounter would have amused me briefly and then floated out of my memory, were it not for two posts that appeared on my facebook feed, one on Thursday and one on Friday. One said this: "It may sound silly, but one of my life goals has been to be a "regular." You know, the "they have your drink ready when you walk through the door" kind of customer? The "everybody knows your name" kind of customer? Well, for about the last year and a half, I've gotten my wish." And then he went on to tell about his favorite local coffee place. The other said this: "I just walked into the [Red Onion Cafe](#), walked up to the counter, and the guy said, "French Toasted Tuna...?" To which I replied, "Yes! Thank you." I truly LOVE being a regular at places as well. It just feels good to be known doesn't it?"

It does feel good to be known, though I am not at all sure about a French toasted tuna sandwich. It feels good to be known, at least at that kind of superficial level. I'm willing for the waitress at Hank's Express to know my name and know that I want one scrambled egg, bacon, hash browns, and for heaven's sake a biscuit rather than toast. That's the #1 plate on the breakfast menu. I'm willing for her to know me like that. I'm willing for most people to know me like that: that I like chocolate, that I have a dog named Daisy, that I have a family. That's all fine.

I'm willing for fewer people to know me better than that level. I think most of you fall into this next level. You know that I cry easily. You know that I may seem shy but always have a lot in my brain. I hope you know that when I love, I am all in. This is a good category to be in, to be known in real ways, in things flattering and things not so flattering.

The next category for me is mostly where friends of long standing go. People who know the back story. People who I only have to say one word or one name, and they know where the story is going. People who know a shared history and remember things

I've shared and held them close. There really aren't very many people in this category, and I suppose that the older I get, the less willing I am to add people who know me this well.

Family goes in the next one. People who know me very well by virtue of living with me. You notice I'm sharing less and less as I go on. My family knows plenty of not-so-nice things about me, knows more about how I tick, knows how to push my buttons and how to avoid pushing them.

I think that Andy gets a special category. We've been married for 22 years, and maybe you have experienced this too—I've gotten to the point that I don't even have to finish the sentence and he knows me well enough to know what I am going to say. Not always, but most of the time. This week, for instance, I've been trying to figure out this new appliance we have called an instant pot. It's basically a fancy pressure cooker, but for some reason I was not able to cook rice this week. It was the last in a string of last straws, so I called him about 30 minutes before supper time and spluttered something about instant pot and crunchy rice and sighed a few times, and he replied "I'll get pizza for supper." He knew that's what I needed. Now sometimes it goes wrong, and I have to say, "let me finish my sentence," but for times when I can't even start the sentence, he's been pretty on the money lately. I'm almost to the tipping point to where I've been married longer than I was not married, so I'm pretty sure he gets his own category of people who know me.

And then there's God. God knows me better than anybody else. Better than I know myself. And God knows you better than anybody else does, and knows you better than you know yourself. And that feels good, to be known. <pause> And it can feel not so good. Do we really want God to know *everything*?

It can make us feel vulnerable to know that another person knows us. It is that much scarier to be known by God. We do not have the choice to risk ourselves, because we are already known. We are already vulnerable and we didn't even have the chance to run away.

Indeed, as the Psalmist tells us, we can't get away from God no matter how hard we try. The writer of this Psalm imagines going to the farthest limits of the universe as he knows it...up to the heavens, down to the depths, to the east and west and north and south. Everywhere, God is there. God is at the end of infinity and at the ends of the earth. God is there and God knows you.

It's almost like that annoying kid in elementary school. I'm guessing there was at least one in every class. That kid who was just weird. For us, it was Brandon. Brandon was just weird. And, rumor had it, he picked his nose. You didn't want Brandon to be anywhere near where you were. Brandon didn't get picked for our soccer games at recess. No one wanted Brandon to sit near their desk. But everywhere you turned around, Brandon was right there. Poor kid. Just trying to fit in, really, but to be seen

with Brandon was the social kiss of death in sixth grade. In P.E. class, we had a unit in which we learned to square dance. We had to square dance for six weeks. It seemed like a year, especially for a non-dancer like me and even more so when partners were assigned. That's right. Brandon the nose-picker was my partner. For the entire six weeks. Everywhere I turned around, there Brandon was. At my shoulder all the time. I tried to avoid him. Just to have someone hanging over my shoulder all the time was annoying, but to have it be Brandon the nose-picker was even worse. It was like he thought I had asked to be his square dance partner.

But to have God looking over my shoulder all the time. Seeing me be rude to Brandon the nose-picker. Watching my every move with no escape possible. I confess, that's a little annoying too. Scary and unsettling. But that's how the psalmist describes it. And the psalmist is right. Otherwise God wouldn't be God and we wouldn't be the humans that we are.

While we must confess that we are ashamed and frightened and even a bit annoyed to have God with us always, even when we retreat into the depths of ourselves, there is more to this psalm than this. The intimacy which this psalm describes is meant to be a comfort.

God knows you. You don't have to hide. You don't have to pretend to be someone else. God knows everything about you. For the psalmist, God's omniscience is expressed in intimacy. Let me say that again. God's omniscience is expressed in intimacy. What could be abstract and a way to make God different and separate from us is instead a way to be intimate with God. God knows you, better than anyone else, better than you know yourself. And God loves you, better than anyone else, better than you love yourself. God knows all of the yucky things about you and loves you anyway.

God knows us, knows our shortcomings, knows us before we were born and after we die, knows our thoughts and words, knows our everyday actions and lives. God knows our inmost thoughts and those things that are so deep inside of us that they don't even have thoughts to go with them. God really does know us better than we know ourselves. Knowing that God knows us helps us to know ourselves. There is no reason to hide from ourselves, because we can't hide from God.

No matter how far we feel we have run from God, God is there. No matter how distant we feel our behavior or thoughts or actions are from God, God is not far away. God knows us and is there with us, with us in our journeys, with us in our wanderings, with us at journey's beginning and journey's end. Ultimately, this is a security and a comfort and a gift of grace, though it may make us squirm uncomfortably from time to time. As Paul assures us in Romans, nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I want to close with something a little different. I took a little liberty and rewrote the psalm as if God were speaking it to us, and I'm using a different version than we

read earlier. Listen for the blessing within it, God saying these words to you.

*My child, I have examined you. I know you. I know when you sit down and when you stand up. Even from far away, I comprehend your plans. I study your traveling and resting. I'm thoroughly familiar with all your ways. There isn't a word on your tongue that I don't already know completely.*

*I surround you—front and back. I put my hand on you...Where could you go to get away from my spirit? Where could you go to escape my presence? If you went up to heaven, I would be there. If you went down to the grave, I would be there too! If you could fly on the wings of the dawn, stopping to rest only on the far side of the ocean—even there my hand would guide you; even there my strong hand would hold you tight. If you said, "The darkness will definitely hide me; the light will become night around me," even then the darkness isn't too dark for me! Nighttime will shine bright as day, because darkness is the same as light to me.*

*I am the one who created your innermost parts. I knit you together while you were still in your mother's womb...your bones weren't hidden from me when you were being put together in a secret place, when you were being woven together in the deep part of the earth. My eyes saw you, and on my scroll every day was written that was being formed for you, before any one of them had yet happened...*

*I will examine you, my child. I will look at your heart. I will put you to the test, and I know already your anxious thoughts. I will look to see if there is any hurtful way in you, and I will lead you on the eternal path! (Common English Bible, adapted).*