

Sermon – Psalm 139

O Lord, you have searched me and known me.

You know when I sit or when I stand;
you comprehend my thoughts long before.

It's been another busy week in the parish. Yesterday we held our Alpha Holy Spirit Day, a day which focuses on the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the accompanying spiritual gifts. On Friday, we gathered in the evening here to walk through Philip and Soraya's wedding next Saturday, and on Wednesday, we held the funeral for Kevin Butterworth, a much loved father, grandfather and community member, one of our Food Relief volunteers, who only last November attended our Volunteers' dinner in full Aussie regalia.

For me, there's nothing quite like a funeral to bring the immediacy of God into the picture. I feel that God hovers at a funeral. The air seems heavy with the intensity of emotion. Love spills out. And every funeral brings a range of people with a diversity of beliefs, but love spills out and the presence of God is tangible. God at the centre of life and death and new life. So, as I reflected on the meaning of God Centred this week, the second in our triptych of Vision words, I couldn't help but marvel at the verses from this week's lectionary, psalm 139. The language is extremely poetic. It's clearly a hymn of praise in these first three stanzas, depicting in each segment, a specific aspect of God's awesomeness. So before we talk about what it means for us to be God Centred, in the world of today, on Father's Day, let's have a look at God, as described two and half thousand years ago by the psalmist, whose way with words must surely be inspired by God.

Well I'm not sure how you felt as we read together through these 18 verses of Psalm 139, but I loved the rhythm and cadence that becomes fairly quickly apparent as the beautiful words roll off the tongue.

O Lord, you have searched me and known me.
You know when I sit or when I stand;
you comprehend my thoughts long before.
You discern my path and the places where I rest:
you are acquainted with all my ways.
For there is not a word on my tongue:
but you, Lord, know it altogether.
You have encompassed me behind and before:
and have laid your hand upon me.

In this first section of the psalm, we hear of an intimate God. A God who searches us out, a God of relationship, a God who is acquainted with all our ways, even our thoughts and words, before we even think of or utter them. And this God of relationship is emphasized even in the constant use of first and second person pronouns, "you" and "I" language.

You discern my path and the places where I rest:
you are acquainted with all my ways.

This idea of an intimate God of relationship, the centrality of God in our lives. A God who surrounds us and even lays hands upon us. A God who satisfies our craving for intimacy and connection.

And then the psalmist changes tack in the next 6 verses and describes an ever present, omnipotent God. A God who is everywhere:

Where shall I go from your spirit:
Or where shall I flee from your presence?

If I ascend to heaven, you are there:
if I make my bed in the grave you are there also.
If I spread out my wings towards the morning:
or dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea.

It doesn't seem to matter where we are, at any end of the world, heaven or earth, in darkness or in light, God is still there to lead us. This awesome God is not only a God of relationship, but is also everywhere, all encompassing, all seeing. God is present in our lives, wherever we find ourselves, in whatever state we find ourselves.

And in the third stanza, the psalmist describes the creator God.

For you have created my inward parts:
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

And not only has God created us, God knows our very soul and even underwrites our life in God's own divine book as in verse 16, which I've taken from the translation in our pew Bibles, which says:

Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.
In your book were written
all the days that were formed for me,
when none of them as yet existed.

And the psalmist concludes that the thoughts of God are beyond comprehension:

How deep are your thoughts to me, O God:
and how great is the sum of them!
Were I to count them, they are more in number than the sand:
were I to come to the end, I would still be with you.

This God, our creator God, is a God who is both relational and transcendent. There is no escaping this God who is ever present and all knowing. God is there for us, but are we willing to make God the centerpiece of our lives?

In our gospel reading today, Jesus challenges us to take up our cross and follow him. How do we make God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit the centre of our lives? How do we become God Centred, both as individuals and as a community? Let's take some time now to pause and consider these questions and have a conversation.

What does God Centred mean to us personally?

How do we individually express our God Centredness?

How do we as a group, make God the Centre of our parish activities?

How can we show our God Centredness to others in our community?

Next week, we will look at the third theme in our Vision - Thriving. Perhaps the questions to ask will be what does thriving mean in my life, my world, my church? I look forward to hearing what you have to say! Let us pray.

Loving Creator God, we give you thanks that you offer us a relationship with you through your Son our saviour Jesus Christ and through the Holy spirit. Equip us and strengthen us with your gifts and blessings to enable us to turn to you and demonstrate your love in our lives here in Lara and Little River. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.