

Sibyls Service Friday 25th July. 7.00pm Theme: A personal reflection on Psalm 139

Call to Worship

words from Psalm 146.....

Alleluia! My soul, give praise to the Lord;
I will praise the Lord all my days,
Make music to my God while I live.

Hymn

In Christ Alone... (Keith Getty/Stuart Townend)

Readings:

Paraphrase of Psalm 139 & Romans 8: v31-39

Paraphrase of Psalm 139 by Ian Pitt-Watson

You are before me, Lord, You are behind,
And over me You have spread out Your hand;
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
Too high to grasp, too great to understand.

Then from Your Spirit where, Lord shall I go;
And from your presence where, Lord, shall I fly?
If I ascend to heaven You are there,
And still are with me if in hell I lie.

If I should take my flight into the dawn,
If I should dwell on ocean's farthest shore,
Your mighty hand will rest upon me still,
And Your right hand will guard me evermore.

If I should say, 'Let darkness cover me,
And I shall hide within the veil of night',
Surely the darkness is not dark to You;
The night is as the day, the darkness light.

Search me, O God, search me and know my heart;
Try me, O God, my mind and spirit try;
Keep me from any path that gives You pain,
And lead me in the everlasting way.

Romans 8, v31-39 reading from the New English Bible

With all this in mind, what are we to say? If God is on our side, who is against us? He did not spare his own Son, but surrendered him for us all; and with this gift how can he fail to lavish on us, all he has to give? Who will be the accuser of God's chosen ones? It is God who pronounces acquittal: then who can condemn? It is Christ – Christ who died, and, more than that, was raised from the dead – who is at God's right hand, and indeed pleads our cause. Then what can separate us from the love of Christ? Can affliction or hardship? Can persecution, hunger, nakedness, peril, or the sword? "We are being done to death for thy sake all day long," as Scripture says; "we have been treated like lambs for slaughter" – and yet in spite of all, overwhelming victory is ours through him who loved us. For I am convinced that there is nothing in death or life, in the realm of spirits or superhuman powers, in the world as it is or the world as it shall be, in the forces of the universe, in heights or depths – nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Reflection by Jan “No Hiding Place”

Psalms 139 is a psalm of David and it speaks of God's infinite knowledge that reaches all people and things.

That God has perfect knowledge of us, and our thoughts are open before Him. God's perfect knowledge of humankind.

As children we almost certainly played the game of 'Hide & Seek' – closing our eyes and counting to 50 while others hide, then going to look for them. As parents or as grandparents, or uncles or aunts, we've probably played another version of it with our very young children – hiding our face behind our hands, then: *'Peep-o, I see you'*.

This activity of hiding and seeking stays with us through life in one form or another. Was the Psalmist aware of this when writing the psalm we know as Psalm 139? It's a psalm that I'm particularly drawn to and is never far from my mind. My name for it is the ***'No hiding place'*** psalm.

This psalm, my 'no hiding place' psalm, speaks of the Lord having searched me out and known me, discerning my path, being acquainted with my ways, encompassing me behind and before. It goes on.....

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

If I ascend into 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, even there your hand shall lead me and your right hand shall hold me.

If I say 'surely the darkness will cover me: and the night will enclose me' the darkness is no darkness with you but the night is as clear as the day: the darkness and light are both alike”.

It has echoes of Deuteronomy 31 v6:

“Your God, the Lord himself will be with you. He will not fail you or abandon you” – words of Moses which would probably have been known to the Psalmist.

When I refer to this psalm as the ‘no hiding place’ psalm, the no hiding place that I think of, and draw comfort from, does not threaten but reassures. Let me explain. There are times in life when we try and hide ourselves from the eyes of the world, or from God. Feeling unloved, unlovely, or guilty, or ashamed, or nursing a secret that is just too secret to share, or just plain hurt with the way the world has used, or abused, us. And so....what do we do?

We retreat figuratively into our own private space – pulling the door tightly shut behind us.

- Lock the doors
- Close the blinds
- Raise the drawbridge
- Fill the moat
- Drop the portcullis

No one can see us or get to us, and there are times when that ‘no-one’ includes God....or so we imagine.

It’s a liberating and, yes, frightening experience when we realize that whilst we’ve shut the world out – thinking that it’s hidden from us, or us from the world, not only can God see us in our private space, our private hell, our closet, our hiding place – whatever we choose to call it, whatever we may be going through, the simple fact is that **God’s there with us!**

- This place, this **safe** space into which we’ve retreated, or maybe from which we’ve never emerged has just been blown wide open.....

- Defensive ramparts-gone
 - Blinds – gone
 - Doors – gone
 - Drawbridge – gone
 - Moat – gone
 - Portcullis – gone
 - The get out of jail free card – gone
- That's the one that says we must make ourselves acceptable to God before we can be accepted by God.
- {Charles Wesley roundly refutes the idea in one of his hymns when he writes:
- “At last I own it cannot be
That I should fit myself for thee:
Here then to thee I all resign;
Thine is the work, and only Thine”}.

WHY ?

..because God is there in that moment...God sees....God knows...God loves.
God loves! As we are, there and then, warts an' all !

Looking again at the psalm, to me it's message is plain –

- I know you
- I know when you're hurt
- I know your secrets, your burdens
- The things that terrify the life out of you
- I love you
- I've always loved you
- I'm always with you.

I'm reminded of the words of a prayer –

"In the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ I need no mask, I am known and loved. No hiding of myself is possible or necessary".

Here, then, we can pick up those words from Romans. The words of the Psalmist echoed by Paul when he writes:

"For I am convinced that there is nothing"

(and here I can almost visualise him adding '**watch my lips!**')
*"**nothing** in death or life, in the realms of spirits or superhuman powers, in the world as it*

*is or the world as it shall be, in the forces of the universe, in the heights or depths –
nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord".*

Nothing in all creation.

Paul himself would surely have been familiar with the words of that psalm, but he's able to take them to a new level because he was writing from a post-incarnation, post-Resurrection perspective. A new dimension. A new dynamic – the love of God revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. Available to all. **Available to all!**

No, in my experience the words of the Psalm are not words of vengeance or retribution –

'You can run but you cannot hide'.

Rather, they are words of reassurance..... 'I know everything about you, I love you, I've always loved you. Nothing will ever stop me loving you. Where-ever you have been, where-ever you are now, and where-ever the future will take you..... ***I'm there with you'.***

The reassurance, the **certainty**, that there is nowhere that I can be where God is not.

And so for me today, for us today that is Good News.....

Good news declared by the Psalmist and underwritten by Paul.....

the Good News that there is

- No hiding place
- No abandonment
- No separation –
from the love of God, from the love of Jesus Christ.

That's God's promise, and that really is Good News for you and for me. Amen.

Song by Karen Bishop

Paraphrases of Psalm 139

A letter from God (Rev Barbara Duchars)

My child I love you.

I have always loved you.

I have loved you before you were born.

I know you.

I know you through and through.

I know your inner fears and deepest secrets.

Still I love you.

I love you, I have always loved you.

Nothing can separate you from my love.

Always, Mother and Father God

Cara Heafey Psalm 139 retold

This was written when she had in mind LGBT Christians who may have been wounded by the church. I'm prompted to include this after reading what a young, attractive trans girl had posted on FaceBook :

'I am heartbroken.....the Pastor at my Church has refused to baptize me because I'm trans'.

Here then is Cara's paraphrase of Psalm 139.....

I made you myself, carefully and lovingly. I gathered your molecules together,
Scooping them out of the dust, warming them into clay.
I formed you, deftly, with the skill and vision of an artist
Into a unique creation. A tiny masterpiece.
Your contours bear the imprint of my fingers.
Your imperfections and irregularities are a part of my design;
they are what makes you beautiful.
I breathed life into you with my own breath.
To behold what I have brought into being in you fills me with pleasure and pride.
As I cradle you in cupped hands, how could I feel anything but love?
It is my love for you that brought you into existence.
I know you more intimately than you could ever know yourself.
I know your thoughts before you think them, your words before you speak them,
the pattern and purpose of your days before you live them.
There is no point in hiding or pretending; don't even try.

Who told you that I did not love you? Who taught you to be ashamed?
Listen to me. Hear the very words that I whispered into you
At the moment of your beginning:
“You are my beloved child, with you I am well pleased.
You are my beloved child, I will never let you go.
You are my beloved child; do not be afraid to be yourself”

Prayers of Intercession

These prayers of intercession are from David Adam’s booklet “sixty more themed intercessions”
(Publisher Kevin Mayhew) *with additional Liturgical material by Jan Goddard.*

To the bidding ‘Lord, your kingdom come’ please respond **‘in us as in heaven’**

Will you pray with me?

Blessed are you, Lord our God,
for you love us with an everlasting love
and sent your Son to be our Saviour.
He came and died that we might live.
Now he is the King of kings and Lord of lords.
May we do your will and share in your kingdom.
Blessed are you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Father, we give you thanks
that in Christ Jesus you have redeemed the world.
He died that we might live.
He reigns with you and seeks us to be part of his kingdom.
We pray for all who are seeking to serve you in their daily lives.

We remember especially
Any who are being persecuted for their faith.
Lord, give us the courage to speak for you
and to witness to your love.

Silence

Lord, your kingdom come
in us as in heaven.

We ask your blessing upon all leaders of people,
all governments and rulers.
We long for the time when the kingdoms of earth
will become the kingdom of Christ our Lord.
We ask you to guide and strengthen
all who work for peace and justice.
Inspire all who seek to enrich your world
through art, music or through their daily lives.

Silence

Lord, your kingdom come
in us as in heaven.

Lord Jesus, come as our King and rule in our lives.
May we seek to serve you in our homes and in our daily work.
May we strive for your kingdom in all our dealings.
We ask your blessing upon all who are dear to us;
through their love may we learn to love you more.

Silence

Lord, your kingdom come
in us as in heaven.

We remember all who have lost faith in you
or in their neighbours.

We pray for all who walk in darkness,
for the discouraged and the despairing.

May they come to know your love and saving power.

We ask your blessing upon all who are suffering
and all who are distressed at this time.

We pray especially for friends who are ill;

remembering especially at this time Jennie-Anne receiving chemotherapy.

We remember our trans siblings who are fearful about life

in the aftermath of the recent Supreme Court ruling

defining what is 'man' and what is 'woman', and the ramifications

on medical treatment for those beginning or undergoing transitioning.

Silence

Lord, your kingdom come
in us as in heaven.

We give thanks for the victory of our Lord

Over hatred, darkness and death,

and that he has opened the kingdom to all who turn to him.

we pray for your blessing upon our loved ones departed from us.

May they rejoice in the fullness and glory of your kingdom.

Silence

Merciful Parent,
**Accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.**

Let us say together the prayer that Jesus taught us.

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy Name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen**

Blessing

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, evermore. Amen.

Hymn

And can it be that I should gain.... (Charles Wesley)