

Lord, You know me.  
You know when I sit down and when I stand up.  
Even from far away, You comprehend my plans.  
You study my traveling and resting.  
You are thoroughly familiar with all my ways.  
Worship Leader 2: There isn't a word on my tongue, Lord,  
that You don't already know completely.  
You surround me - front and back.  
You put Your hand on me.  
That kind of knowledge is too much for me;  
it's so high above me that I can't fathom it.

**Everyone: Lord, where could I go  
to get away from Your Spirit?  
Where could I go to escape Your Presence?  
If I went up to heaven, You would be there.  
If I went down to the grave, You would be there too!**

Worship Leader 1: If I could fly on the wings of dawn,  
stopping to rest only on the far side of the ocean -  
even there Your hand would guide me;  
even there Your strong hand would hold me tight!

**Everyone: If I said, "The darkness will definitely hide me;  
the light will become night around me,"  
even then the darkness isn't too dark for You!  
Nighttime would shine bright as day,  
because darkness is the same as light to You!**

Worship Leader 2: You are the One  
who created my innermost parts;  
You knit me together while I was still in my mother's womb.

**Everyone: I give thanks to You  
that I was marvelously made.  
Your works are wonderful - I know that very well.**

Worship Leader 1: My bones weren't hidden from You  
when I was being put together in a secret place,  
when I was being woven together in the deep parts of the  
earth.  
God, Your thoughts are incomprehensible to me!  
Their total number is countless!

If I tried to count them - they outnumber grains of sand!  
If I came to the very end - I'd still be with You.

**Everyone: Examine me, God! Look at my heart!  
Put me to the test! Know my anxious thoughts!**

Worship Leader 2: Look to see if there is any hurtful way in me,  
then lead me on the eternal path.

One of my Facebook friends posted - referring to the seemingly endless forest fires, hurricanes, tornadoes and earthquakes - can't the earth get a break? And someone else told me that all these global catastrophes means that God is trying to get our attention, to show us that this is the end times. End-of-the-world comments are such an invitation for a pastoral discourse (but I resisted.) I said instead that God is always trying to get our attention. If we are the body of Christ... the hands and feet and compassionate heart of Christ, then God is always calling our attention to the needs of this battered and bleeding world.

Last week we heard the Jewish midrash that the light God created was too much to contain, and so it burst and scattered God's light into the world.... And we got little "pieces of light" to remind us to look for God's light, and to use it to help repair the world. Last week I talked about the darkness in the world, and the need for us to pray over it... to pray over the news.

It's God's delightful sense of humor that after saying that last Sunday, during the week I read an article in the newspaper, and laid my head down in despair, and in tears I cried, "O God!" And the Holy Spirit said to me "Remember your words on Sunday to the congregation to pray over the news? Here's your opportunity." And I prayed over this news story.

The lack of evidence that God is active in the world is disheartening. As I heard at our first Sunday night candlelight vigil, "If you're not stunned and discouraged about the darkness and hatred in the world... you're not paying attention." As followers of Jesus we must pay attention to the hurt and pain the world. That's one of the places we meet Jesus... in those places, in those situations, that break His heart that also break our hearts. That's what it is to have the compassionate heart of Jesus... it is to suffer with those He suffers with. The word "compassion" means literally "to suffer with".

Jesus was moved with grief and sadness for outcasts and sinners, for unscrupulous tax collectors and problematic women, for the sick and the suffering. But it wasn't enough for Jesus to feel for people ~ His sadness moved Him - it physically moved Him - into relationships with all kinds of people, and He healed them, and touched them, and ate with them... in order to show them His heart, God's heart, of love. Jesus' relationship with His Abba-Papa-Father kept Him, I think, from despairing over humanity. I'm sure He did some face-palming because His followers (like us) were slow to see through His eyes, God's eyes, of love. Jesus had a different perspective of

sin and brokenness. He knew that the world would someday be redeemed, and He taught His followers to be part of the hope and healing of the world.

As His followers, it isn't enough for us to "feel" for people, although we need to feel grief and sadness for those who suffer. We need to acknowledge that we are all children of God; we are connected to the whole human family. To not feel pain and grief over the brokenness of the world would mean that we are like lifeless robots. But to suffer with people, as Jesus did, is to be moved... from heartache to acts of justice, and compassion, and peace... to be moved from despair to prayer, and hope, and trust.

I confess, that sometimes I stumble into the swamp of sorrow and despair over the darkness in the world, and I get tangled in vines of hopelessness, and sucked into the quicksand of overwhelm. Listening to a whole podcast of NPR's "Democracy Now", for instance, can be the path to the swamp. How do I, how do we, allow the world's brokenness of war, hatred, poverty, greed, and depravity, to move our hearts, and yet not to immobilize us, so we are still able to be openhearted and to have the tender heart of Jesus?

Prayer and perspective are helpful tools for compassion and action. Prayer is the relationship we have with Jesus, with Abba-God, with the Holy Spirit, that gives us confidence to believe that we are known and loved... we are fully known... and we are fully loved. Prayer - listening to God, and listening for God - reassures us that we are God's beloved, held in God's heart.... and that all of us are God's beloved, and all the world is held in God's heart. It's not through an act of will that we have a relationship with Jesus and accept His love... it's through surrender, it's just by allowing ourselves to be loved. Godly perspective, or having the tenderheartedness of Jesus, comes after we surrender to love. When we know ourselves to be loved, we can love others. We can risk openheartedness with others because Jesus has risked His heart with us. And if we are so loved, we can be confident that God is with us.

There is a place between shutting out the suffering in the world and drowning in its sorrow and brokenness. That place is in the presence of God. Psalm 139 is about the presence of God. It reminds us that there is no place we can go where God is not. God is with us. This is the promise of Christmas: Jesus who is known as Emmanuel, God-with-us, came to share this human life with us. And it's the promise of Easter: that not even death can keep Jesus from us. In life, in death, and in all the spaces in between, God is with us.

John Wesley was the founder of Methodism. His fellow Oxford students mocked him for being so methodical (this was before people were called OCD for being extremely precise) about his Christian practices... they called him a "method-ist." Wesley's teaching and writing was orderly, methodical, practical. But on his deathbed he cried out, "The best of all... God is with us!"

If we believe that God is with us (and faith is not a passive thing... faith looks for and listens for and celebrates God's presence in the world) then we can pray over the

news, the sorrows and brokenness and horrors of the news, because... God is there. And because God is present in the world, in the hardest places, in the most tragic situations, we can go there... because God is there. We can work to ease the suffering, to make peace, to repair the world... because God is here. God is already here; here with us. God may show you a house to rebuild in Houston, or a crate of apples at the Food Bank, or a letter to write to an elected official, or a protest to march in, or a lonely old person to visit, or an enemy to love. We can do this hard work of looking for God's light, and repairing the world, because God is here, with us.

Psalm 139 is one of my go-to scriptures. It's a reminder of the intimate relationship God has with us... that nothing in us is hidden from God... and it's a celebration that there is no place that is unknown to God. We have bookmarks with Psalm 139 on one side, and on the other are some of the heartbreaking places and situations in the world. There's a reminder from Psalm 139 after each situation: Lord, You are there. At the bottom of the bookmark are two blank lines for you to write on. And as we begin a time of prayer, I invite you to write on those lines, something that breaks your heart, that breaks God's heart. And to remember even in brokenheartedness: Lord, You are there. Let's begin a time of silence as we ask the Lord to reveal what He would have us pray over.