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CONCORD
SUNDAY
SCHOOL

LESSON 29

SUNDAY,
JULY 19,
2020

Psalm 139:1-12, 23-24

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 far away. 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, O LORD, you know it completely. 5 You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it. 7 Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?

8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. 9 If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, 10 even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast. 11 If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night," 12 even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you. 23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. 24 See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Background

This Psalm is a favorite. In it, readers (and hearers) are invited to reflect on the inescapable God. The poetry of the passage demands further study and reflection. In your own devotional period, take the time to read this passage out loud. What words and phrases stand out for you? What images feel most familiar to you?

Today's lesson will focus on the need for accountability processes-- both Divinely-inspired and human-designed.

Read the scripture out loud together.

Discuss with someone in your home. What is accountability to you? Have you ever been called in about something?

What's happening during this passage?

The writer speaks of an intimate relationship with the Creator. It is the Lord who has "searched and known" this writer. The Lord knows this person's schedule, even when they "sit down and rise up." The passage invokes a sense of closeness. After all, the Lord not only "knows" and is "acquainted" with the writer, but the Lord "hems" in and "lays a hand." Rhetorical questions abound. Where can one go to escape God? Heaven? Sheol? Beyond the limits of the sea? God is there too.

What does God do for the writer? Circle/list all the active verbs that God does in this passage.

Search. Known. Discern. Hem. Lay a hand. Lead. Hold. Test. See. Lead.

God is busy in this passage! What is your reaction to this list of actions? Does it make you feel safe? Watched? Tracked? Comforted?

What kind of God do we meet through these verbs?

God is, at the very least, active. Beyond being involved in the world, God takes a serious interest in the life of the writer. When you are experiencing great sadness, it's nice to know that someone sees, cares, and intervenes. The writer cannot escape the wisdom of God. Upon witnessing all the events in the writer's life, God finds a way to bring the writer to accountability. God isn't a cruel or unsympathetic judge. Instead, God is described like a kind elder with wise sayings. God is a friendly neighborhood face.

Is God really everywhere?

The word "presence" can also be translated to "face" or "faces." What would it look like to see faces of God?

St. Teresa of Ávila wrote, "Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands

through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.” While this psalm was written years before Christ would come to Earth, we can apply this psalm to God’s presence. God has no body but ours. We may or may not see God on Earth. But we can see each other.

It is not our responsibility to police each other or harass each other. That’s not what God does in this passage. We can check in on each other and support each other in the most loving of ways. Imagine if every neighborhood was full of people who embodied the divine care verbs here? What if we took our responsibility to “be the hands, feet, eyes and body” of God more seriously?

God does “lay a hand” on the writer. Given the rest of the passage, we can infer that this is a **loving, gentle** hand.

What questions do you still have of this scripture? How will you commit to journeying with this text this week?



Connection to Today’s World

Best friends and partners Ashley Ellis and Quandisha German reflected on the needs their Bronx Community had. While working with justice system-involved youth, they realized that community members had the power to anticipate and positively intervene in the lives of their young people. In Ellis’ own words, the two are called to “shift the culture” of our society “from reactive or punitive” to one that “can rely on restorative actions.” Instead of waiting for children

to show up in the justice system, they both sought out ways to support Black and Brown youth on the front end. The result?

House of B.R.E.A.T.H.E. The community space hosts events, designs and facilitates sacred healing space, teaches young people about culinary arts, and hosts restorative justice circles. Building community is hard. Conflicts arise often. But the two have made a commitment to support each other and their community by setting up a space that can hold a range of human experience. Their work is successful because they are rooted in the neighborhood. They “lay a hand,” “lead,” “search,” and “hold” their community with intention. In doing so, the team hopes to empower young girls (and everyone else) to be “Balanced, Restored, Empowered, Affirmed, Transformed, Healed & Embodied.” Or, to Breathe. Learn more about their work here: <https://www.thebreathecollective.org/about>

Journal: Take 5 minutes to reflect. Invite God to “search you.” Is there anyone you owe an apology to? How can you make amends and repair that relationship? What will you do if the apology is not accepted? What will be possible if it is accepted?

Closing: Sing/watch “Search Me, Lord,” Ricky Dillard and New G.

For a video, click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JHirJKpDA9c>

*You know Lord
Whether I'm right
You know Lord
Whether I'm wrong
You know Lord
Whether I'm right or wrong
Whether I'm right or wrong*

Prayer:

Dear God,

You know who we are. You know whether we are right or wrong. You know our hearts. You know our habits. You have seen us at our best and at our worst. But you never hold our worst days over our heads. You simply invite us to grow into the best version of ourselves

God, don't hide your face from us. Make your presence known and loving. Show us how to live with integrity.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Works Cited:

<https://www.brooklyncommunityfoundation.org/blog/2016/04/building-stronger-sense-community-through-restorative-justice>

Images: @TheBreathe_Collective on Instagram