

The Rev. Alanna Sullivan:

Good morning.

Congregation:

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The Rev. Alanna Sullivan:

Welcome to morning prayers. We invite you to stand for a responsive reading in our black Appleton Salter book, song number 139 found on page 70. We will read by whole verse. "Oh Lord, you have searched me and know me.

Congregation:

You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.

The Rev. Alanna Sullivan:

You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways.

Congregation:

Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely.

The Rev. Alanna Sullivan:

You hem me in behind and before and lay your hand upon me.

Congregation:

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.

The Rev. Alanna Sullivan:

Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence

Congregation:

If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

The Rev. Alanna Sullivan:

If I take the wings of the morning and settle up the farthest limits of the sea.

Congregation:

Even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.

The Rev. Alanna Sullivan:

If I say surely the darkness shall cover me and the light around me become night.

Congregation:

Even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.

Choir: (Singing)

The Rev. Alanna Sullivan:

I'm going to commit a morning prayer taboo, and just say thank you for that glorious, glorious offering. Such a bomb. So this little black book that we read from not so long ago is known as the Appleton Salter book. It is an integral part of our worshiping tradition of morning prayers here at the Memorial Church and it was specifically and lovingly crafted for this very service. So in case you are new here, it might be helpful to know that our daily responsive readings come from the Salter, also known as the book of Psalms, a book in the Hebrew Bible. It is a collection of songs and prayers gathered over the course of hundreds of years, ranging from the beginning of ancient Israel to after the Babylonian exile.

It, in fact, was the traditional hymn book of the holy temple in Jerusalem and an integral part of its worship. Many, in fact, are attributed to King David. The songs were composed for the worship needs of a particular community, yet generations of different people and of different faiths have turned to them. They contain almost every human emotion imaginable; reverence, fear, anguish, love, betrayal, and joy. There is nothing the psalmist, the composer of the psalms, does not bring to God.

Beloved preacher and professor Peter Gomes once said, "No one can read the psalms without the sense of the psalmist's psychological insight into the depth and breadth of human experience." Or as another peace minister Stephanie Paulsell put it, "The songs take us all the way in and all of the way down." By reading these psalms at the start of each day, we are inviting to bring our whole selves to God, no matter where we find ourselves each morning. Our psalm selection for today happens to be my favorite. "Oh Lord. You have searched me and know me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up. You discern my thoughts from far away. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my base. Even before a word is on my tongue, oh Lord, you know it completely."

The psalmist tells us of how wonderful it is to be searched for and known by God. God is in the everydayness of his sitting down and rising up, walking, stopping, speaking. The psalmist has an acute awareness that God is the encompassing presence of his life, for it is in God that we live and move and have our being. The promise of this psalm is that we are not forced to scrounge the scraps of barren relationships. God does not forget us. We are not alone. What no one sees or has time to notice, God sees, and God doesn't tire of us. We are endlessly fascinating and interesting to God. God searches to learn more about us. For this is the God whose eye is on the sparrow, the lost sheep, the missing coin, and knit us together in our mother's world. How wonderful it is to be searched for and known by God.

Yet the psalm goes on. "Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there. If I make my bed and shale, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle up the farthest limits of the sea, even there, your hand shall lead me and your right hand shall hold me fast." How wonderful it is to be searched for and known by God. How wonderful and how fearful, for there is no mistake in God. Often we want to be recognized by those around us on our own terms. We don't want anyone, even God, perhaps especially God, to know everything about us. No matter how much we say it otherwise, we like to remain in control of how people perceive us. We spend a lot of time and energy curating how people see us and what information they learn about us.

Could this be why marriage is hard? You get married and then suddenly that person is always there and they know everything about you. Couldn't that also be one reason why parents are so aggravating? Sometimes they really do know us better than ourselves. In fact, their memories of us proceed our own. This psalm's message insists on the consistent presence and knowledge of God in our lives. It debunks our belief in the possibility of pretense. We cannot hide if God really knows us or what we really are like. We cannot live one way before our fellow human beings and another way before God. In turn, we cannot escape God and we cannot escape ourselves. No wonder so many of us try to run away.

How wonderful and how fearful it is to be searched for and known by God. God knows us more fully and more intimately than any other and God still searches for us and still loves us dearly and unconditionally. God loves us in our messiness and in our fragility and in our brokenness, not despite of it. In his book *Wishful Thinking*, the late writer Frederick Buechner called Psalm 1:39 the secret prayer of us all. It is about the hiding and bearing of our secrets. The psalm describes our deepest longing for the paradox of a combination of human confession and divine protection that comes from telling God our secrets, to lay bare our innermost selves and to know that we are still loved unconditionally.

So when I read this psalm, I am left wondering, "What does God's persistent search, knowledge and love ask of us in turn? How does this divine relationship shape our relationship with God and with one another?" My prayer for us this year is that our secret prayer becomes our lived experience, that we may share that fragile and tender self that only God knows with one another, that we may come to know one another more fully and to love one another more unconditionally, just as God does.

Let us join together in saying the prayer that Jesus taught us, saying, "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by 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 and the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen."

Please stand as you are able to sing the hymn *Come Thou Font of Every Blessing*, hymn number 312.

Congregation/Choir: (Singing)

So as we go into this day, may the Lord bless you and keep you, may the Lord's face shine upon you and be gracious unto you and may the Lord grant you peace and the gathered people said, amen.

Congregation:

Amen.