

Psalm 139: 1-18

¹O Lord, you have searched me and known me.
²You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.
³You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways.
⁴Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely.
⁵You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.
⁶Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.
⁷Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?
⁸If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
⁹If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
¹⁰even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.
¹¹If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night,”
¹²even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.
¹³For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.
¹⁴I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.
¹⁵My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
¹⁶Your 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.
¹⁷How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!
¹⁸I try to count them—they are more than the sand; I come to the end—I am still with you.

Isaiah 43:1-7

⁴³But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. ²When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. ³For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you. ⁴Because you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you, I give people in return for you, nations in exchange for your life. ⁵Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you; ⁶I will say to the north, “Give them up,” and to the south, “Do not withhold; bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the end of the earth— ⁷everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.”

He Knows My Name! July 2, 2017

Have you ever had one of those moments when you are at the grocery store or at a restaurant and you run into someone you haven’t seen in a while but whom you’ve known at work, or school, or church? Someone you may have known for most of your life. You smile and say hello and all the while you’re wondering to yourself, “Who is this person? I recognize your face but I can’t remember your name!” And then you start that memory trick where you go through the alphabet...a...b....c...d...e...f...Fred, Fiona, Felix...Oh, Frank! So that was his name! It seems to be happening to me more and more often and I guess getting older has something to do with it. But honestly, sometimes when Barbara Ross, who is my good friend shows up in the pew and I try to introduce her, I draw a complete blank! What is up with that? And I’ll let you in on another secret. When we

have communion by intinction and everyone comes down the aisle to receive the bread and cup, I sometimes can't remember your name. There is a lot of pressure to know so many people by their names and then offer them communion by saying, "Bobby, the bread of Life, Marilyn, the Cup of Salvation...Kyndal...Jocelyn..." Sometimes, I can't remember, and so I'll say, "Child of God, the bread of Heaven, the Cup of Salvation." I can't tell you what a panic that is sometimes. So please don't take it personally if I draw a blank sometimes. I love you all just the same but my memory isn't what it used to be.

And it has me wondering about something. Do you think God ever forgets your name? Do you think that sometimes God arrives on the scene and looks at you or me and says, "Who is this person? For the life of me I can't remember your name. Your face looks familiar but I just can't place you." a...b...c....d...e...f...Oh, Jim, that was his name! Ever wonder if he calls over to Jesus and says, "Hey, JC. Can you give a Father a little help here?" I don't know. Maybe God never forgets a face or a name and I'd like to believe that, wouldn't you? In the gospel of John Jesus says, that his sheep hear his voice and he calls his own by their names...his sheep know him and he knows his sheep. (John 10) But do you know your name when you hear it?

Just this year a friend of mine from the Crossnore church died. I'd known him for a few years. His name was Jack and he was from New York and had lived a pretty wild life. He owned several bars I think, and had that wonderful New York accent! Later in life, he picked up a bible that his neighbors kept leaving for him and read it. God spoke to him in that moment and his life was changed forever. Whoever he was before was transformed into something new. Now Jack was really, really, hard of hearing. He would always sit as close to the pulpit as he could so he could hear the preacher, my good friend Kathy Campbell. But even so, he missed most of it. As a result, Kathy decided to start printing her sermons for those who had a hard time hearing her. I often assisted Kathy in worship as a liturgist, and Jack, for some reason just loved me. He loved the expression on my face when I led in communion and I was one of the few voices he could hear. Something to do with the pitch, I guess. I remember one Sunday coming down the aisle after the service and greeting him and he shook my hand and with tears in his eyes proclaimed, "Charlie! That was wonderful. I just love the look on your face and your expression! So Moving!" It was another one of those memory moments, wasn't it? He was so convinced my name was Charlie, that well, I didn't have the heart to tell him otherwise. This went on for about a year until one summer when I filled in for Kathy while she was having some surgery. Sometime during that summer Jack realized that my name wasn't Charlie and he was a little embarrassed about it. We both had a good laugh about it and it is a memory I will always hold dear.

Because the funny thing is, I began to wonder if maybe Jack knew something about me that I didn't know myself. In some of my digging I found out that the name Charlie is considered one of the friendliest names on the planet. It derives of course from the name Charles which means, "Free Man." At his funeral, I shared this story and it struck me then just as it does now, that maybe that is my real name. Maybe God's name for me is different than the one chosen for me by my parents? Just gets me thinking is all... And while I firmly and unreservedly believe that God knows my name, I still wonder about it. And I wonder if I know my real name?

It reminds me of that wonderful story by Fred Craddock when he and his wife were vacationing in Gatlinburg Tennessee. One night they found a quiet little restaurant where they looked forward to a private meal-just the two of them.

While they were waiting for their meal they noticed a distinguished looking, white-haired man moving from table to table, visiting guests. Craddock whispered to his wife, "I hope he doesn't come over here." He didn't want the man to intrude on their privacy. But the man did come by their table.

"Where you folks from?" he asked amicably.

“We’re from Atlanta.”

“What do you do in Atlanta?”

Hoping to put him off, Craddock said, “I am a professor of homiletics.”

"Oh, so you teach preachers how to preach, do you? Well, I've got a story I want to tell you." And with that he pulled up a chair and sat down at the table with Craddock and his wife.

Dr. Craddock said he groaned inwardly: Oh no, here comes another preacher story. It seems everyone has one.

The man stuck out his hand. "I'm Ben Hooper. I was born not far from here across the mountains. My mother wasn't married when I was born so I had a hard time. When I started to school my classmates had a name for me, and it wasn't a very nice name. I used to go off by myself at recess and during lunch-time because the taunts of my playmates cut so deeply.

"What was worse was going downtown on Saturday afternoon and feeling every eye burning a hole through you. They were all wondering just who my real father was.

"When I was about 12 years old a new preacher came to our church. I would always go in late and slip out early. But one day the preacher said the benediction so fast I got caught and had to walk out with the crowd. I could feel every eye in church on me. Just about the time I got to the door I felt a big hand on my shoulder. I looked up and the preacher was looking right at me.

"Who are you, son? Who's boy, are you?"

I felt the old weight come on me. It was like a big black cloud. Even the preacher was putting me down.

But as he looked down at me, studying my face, he began to smile a big smile of recognition. "Wait a minute," he said, "I know who you are. I see the family resemblance. You are a Child of God."

With that he slapped me across the rump and said, "Boy you've got a great inheritance. Go and claim it."

The old man looked across the table at Fred Craddock and said, "That was the most important single sentence ever said to me." With that he smiled, shook the hands of Craddock and his wife, and moved on to another table to greet old friends.

Then Dr. Craddock remembered his own grandfather telling him the story of an illegitimate boy who grew up in the mountains of East Tennessee, a boy who became an attorney, a boy whom the people of Tennessee later elected to two terms as their governor. That boy was Ben Hooper.”

As we share in communion today we are always reminded of Christ's last meal with his beloved disciples. I'll bet as he went around the table that evening washing their feet and sharing the bread and cup, he looked them in the eyes and called them by name. "Peter, let me wash your feet and tell you about love. John, take this bread and remember me. Thomas, share this cup with me and hold on to your hope." Maybe in this act of sharing bread and cup today we hear our true names. Our true names which may just be *Child of God*, but what a wonderful name that is!

Rev. Billy Strayhorn shared this wonderful story. He said, "A couple of years ago I had the privilege to be one of two clergy from the United States chosen to go to Dublin, Ireland and help the Irish Methodist Church start the *Walk To Emmaus*.

Part of the Walk To Emmaus centers around the Sacrament of Holy Communion which we take every day. Now, you know how I like to call you by name when I serve you the Sacrament, right? Well, not every clergy person does that nor is it practiced everywhere.

I'll never forget the reaction of one of the women on the Walk in Dublin when I called her by name. For one, it wasn't an easy or familiar name. Her name was Ineke. When I said those words, "Ineke, this is the body of Christ given just for you." She jumped. She jumped like I'd just snuck up behind her and yelled "Boo!" or something. She had a very puzzled look on her face as she looked at the piece of bread in her hands and then looked up at me.

And then the most incredible, awe inspiring smile broke out on her face. And there were tears pouring from her eyes as she approached the Chalice. Afterwards she told me that was the first time anyone had ever called her by name when she received the Sacrament. She talked about how liberating it was and said, "'Twas an eye opener. If I knew her name, and knew how to pronounce it, then certainly God knew her name, too." And that made all the difference in the world to her.

The rest of the weekend was great but it was that moment that was defining for her. God knew her name. And she heard God call her by name when I called her by name. And you see, that's the Good News, God does know our name. God knows us more intimately than we know ourselves. God know our comings and goings. God knows our strengths, our weaknesses, our foibles, our failures. God knows our struggles and desire to do right. God knows how easy it is for us to muddy up and cover our lives in filth. God also knows how we prevaricate and make excuses for our own failures and faults while judging harshly, those around us.

God knows all that and the surprising thing is, GOD LOVES US ANYWAY. God loves us anyway. No matter how stupid we get. No matter how many times our brains descend to where we sit. No matter how many times we get it wrong. God loves us."

There is an old praise hymn that often comes to my mind, particularly when I read psalm 139 or think about names. And I'll close with this today. It goes like this.

*I have a maker, He formed my heart
Before even time began, my life was in his hands
He knows my name...he knows my every thought,
He sees each tear that falls and hears me when I call.*

*I have a father, he calls me his own,
He'll never leave me no matter where I go
He knows my name. he knows my every thought.
He sees each tear that falls and hears me when I call
Yes, He hears me when I call.*

Thanks be to God! Amen.