

## Reflection for Sunday, May 29, 2022

### Psalm 139

<sup>1-6</sup> GOD, investigate my life;  
    get all the facts firsthand.  
I'm an open book to you;  
    even from a distance, you know what I'm thinking.  
You know when I leave and when I get back;  
    I'm never out of your sight.  
You know everything I'm going to say  
    before I start the first sentence.  
I look behind me and you're there,  
    then up ahead and you're there, too—  
    your reassuring presence, coming and going.  
This is too much, too wonderful—  
    I can't take it all in!

<sup>7-12</sup> Is there any place I can go to avoid your Spirit?  
    to be out of your sight?  
If I climb to the sky, you're there!  
    If I go underground, you're there!  
If I flew on morning's wings  
    to the far western horizon,  
You'd find me in a minute—  
    you're already there waiting!  
Then I said to myself, "Oh, he even sees me in the dark!  
    At night I'm immersed in the light!"  
It's a fact: darkness isn't dark to you;  
    night and day, darkness and light, they're all the same to you.

<sup>13-16</sup> Oh yes, you shaped me first inside, then out;  
    you formed me in my mother's womb.  
I thank you, High God—you're breathtaking!  
    Body and soul, I am marvelously made!

I worship in adoration—what a creation!  
You know me inside and out,  
    you know every bone in my body;  
You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit,  
    how I was sculpted from nothing into something.  
Like an open book, you watched me grow from conception to birth;  
    all the stages of my life were spread out before you,  
The days of my life all prepared  
    before I'd even lived one day.

<sup>23-24</sup> Investigate my life, O God,  
    find out everything about me;  
Cross-examine and test me,  
    get a clear picture of what I'm about;  
See for yourself whether I've done anything wrong—  
    then guide me on the road to eternal life.

*(The Message translation)*

### **Introduction:**

That is one of the psalms that I go back to over and over, especially when I am feeling lost or alone.  
I read it to my dad in the hospital.

You may have noticed that the Psalms feature heavily in today's service. We don't often talk about the psalms, but they find their way into our hymns and our prayers. They are often what we turn to in our most challenging moments in life.

The Book of Psalms is an anthology. It went through a long process of collecting and editing. There are 150 psalms, divided into 5 parts (probably a deliberate parallel to the five books of the Torah). There are 2 main types of psalms – Laments and Praise.

### **Laments:**

These are prayers of pain, confusion, even anger. They draw attention to what is wrong in the world. They ask God to remember God's promises and do something about it. There are more laments in the earlier part of the book. The sheer number of these psalms should help us understand that lament is an appropriate response to the suffering we see in the world.

### Praise:

These are prayers of joy and celebration. *Hallelu-yah* occurs more than 20 times. It is a combination of "Praise" and "Yah," short for Yahweh. Praise Yahweh! Praise God! These praise psalms draw attention to what's good in the world. They retell stories of what God has done, and thank God for it. Near the end of the Book of Psalms, praise poems come to outnumber laments.

The psalms show that there is a real relationship between God and God's people, one that can be raw at times.

You're about to see a short YouTube film made by Fuller Theological Seminary. It is a conversation between Bono (a famous rock musician) and Eugene Peterson (author), revolving around their common interest in the Psalms. The conversation takes place at Peterson's home in Montana.

The story goes that one day a student of Eugene Peterson's brought a Rolling Stone magazine to class in which Bono (one of the most famous singers in the world) talked about Peterson and his writings and how important they were to him. Eugene didn't know who Bono was. People then started bringing U2's music to Peterson for him to hear and he started to like it and be quite pleased that Bono knew him.

Bono invited Eugene to hang out with him and Peterson turned him down (probably one of the very few people to ever turn Bono down) – he was finishing the translation of the Old Testament and had a deadline looming. "It was Bono!" one interviewer exclaimed. "Dean, it was Isaiah!" Peterson replied.

Eventually, they did meet. Bono invited Eugene and his wife, Jan, to Dallas for a concert and they also had a three hour lunch. Peterson said that there was no pretention, it "felt like he was a companion in the faith."

Here we will get to see Bono visit the Petersons at their house for the first time.

## **VIDEO**

### **Conclusion:**

For about 2000 years the Psalms have been lovingly memorized and prayed - woven into the daily lives of both Jews and Christians.

The psalms' power lies not only in being sacred scripture but also in their ability to reflect human feelings before God - expressing them directly, concretely and truthfully. They can be a guide for modern believers in our relationship with God. Their range and honesty encourage people to come before God in their weakness and need, as well as in their strength. In times of lament and in times of praise.

Bono and Eugene Peterson talked about the brutal honesty in the psalms, and also the vulnerability found within them. They are not always pretty or nice – they are real. God doesn't need flowery language, God wants the *truth* from you.

*I wonder when have you been brutally honest with God?*

This week has been one of violence in the US, with one more mass shooting. This time at a school in Uvalde, TX. I have wanted to call God out – that this is not the world, not the new creation that God has promised, when children are killed in a place that is supposed to be about learning. It is at times like this that I am grateful for the example of the psalms – knowing that I can bring my anger, grief, disbelief that no real change has happen since the last shooting to God.

When I lay those emotions at God's feet, I can then look to see how I might join in the Spirit's work -God's inbreaking into the world – and move from prayer to action.

*So, in utter and irrepressible grief I offer these words from the United Church of Christ...*

God, hear our prayer:

For the nineteen children now dead;

For the teachers now dead;

For the parents, family, and friends who will spend the rest of their lives aching every night from the weight of this;

For a schoolhouse rendered trauma-laden and grief-stricken in a matter of minutes, whose students will suffer PTSD in the wake of this tragedy;

For the caregivers in Uvalde now burdened with the task of managing the shared and collective grief of a traumatized community who love their children;

For those who feel the new burden of useless guilt in the aftermath of this, wondering what else they could have done to prevent this;

For the nation, so in love with their weapons that they continue to tolerate these mass shootings and the grief they inflict without ever building the collective will needed to address it fully;

For the world, suffering a massive and collective grief of its own and witnessing acts of cruelty daily too numerous to fully process.

Heal our gaping wounds.

Restore our sense of compassion.

Quiet the restlessness within us.

Settle the building righteous anger.

Quicken the desire for peace.

Remove the chasm that sees race and religion and political persuasion as the marks of a person's worth and value.

End the cycle of violence that begets more violence.

Silence the voices that broker in fear and division and create the hatred we see mounting everywhere between us.

Quiet the troubled soul thinking of grabbing the next gun and ending innocent lives.

Empower us all to act now, refusing to wait for the next horror before we change the laws that make guns and their discharge so accessible.

Turn anguish to action; our rage to restoration; our hatred to love; our grief to hope.

Let it never happen again. Ever. How much more can we bear, O Lord? How much more can we endure.

Be our rock of refuge.

Be our light of inspiration.

Be our beacon of hope.

Be the arms of love that hold us until the pain recedes.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayers. Amen.

*The three national officers of the United Church of Christ issued a prayer of grief after a gunman killed at least 19 children and 2 adults on May 24 at an elementary school in Uvalde, Tex. The 18-year-old attacker was killed by a law enforcement officer. Uvalde, with some 16,000 residents, is about 85 miles west of San Antonio and 75 miles from the border with Mexico.*

**The National Officers of the United Church of Christ:**

*The Rev. Dr. John C. Dorhauer, The Rev. Traci Blackmon, The Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson*