

Pentecost Sunday School Lessons

Sermon Series: "Psalms of the Spirit"

Date: June 7th

Topic: God's Presence

Open with prayer

Before reading...

When have you felt God's presence away from a Sunday worship experience?

Main Scripture: Psalm 139:1-18

(Read using the responsive reading on the attached page)

Opening Questions:

- Are there any recurring themes in this Psalm?
- Do you identify with the struggle of the Psalmist? What most connects to you?
- What do the closing verses say about the blessings and promises of God?

Some historical background about the Psalms:

While it is often said that the books of Psalms and the psalms themselves are the "hymn book of the bible", it is more accurately stated to be the prayer book of the bible. The essential root of the Psalms is expression of one's faith to the experiences of life. Whether it is expression in pain and lament, through praise and thanksgiving, or in confession and pardon, the Psalms capture the truth of human experience: life has ups and downs. For the people of Israel, having seen the destruction of their nation(s) and experience the dislocation of their people to Babylon and Assyria, the Psalms become a grounding point in which the collected experience of those who have come before may speak to them. While it is unclear whether or not the Psalms themselves were used in temple or synagogue worship, the historical importance of the Psalms to the culture and religious fabric of Israel (and now Christianity) is clear and distinct. The Psalms help persons understand and grasp that their experiences and struggles are not unique, but have been shared by many before. In reading, praying, singing, or reflecting on the Psalms, the reader joins the collective experience of all who have come before.

Scripture commentary:

Psalm 139 has one major theme: God's presence and power is everywhere. There is nothing the reader or people can do to escape the boundless presence and promises of God. Moreover, God's presence goes before and ahead of the reader throughout time. Even in death, the presence of God is there to comfort and bring peace. Traditionally attributed to David, the Psalm uses the most holy version of God's name in Hebrew, generally reserved for the everlasting and omnipresent expression of God. Psalm 139 asks the question: Where can I go from your presence? Where can I go from your Spirit? The resounding answer, the everlasting and almighty God, is nowhere. The passage gets more and more refined, going all the way to the writer's very conception and even then, the presence of God is there. The final statement, a powerful doxology so to speak, encapsulates the entire work: "I am still with you".

- How is the message of the Psalm comforting?
- Why do you think the Psalmist uses the most holy version of God's name? Does that change your reading of the Psalm?
- When have you needed to be reminded of God's presence? Have you ever had an, "I am still with you" moment?

Reflection:

In our ever changing and ever expanding world, the nature of sin, guilt, shame, grief, and dislocation can not only burden our hearts and minds, but trap us in a feeling of separation from God. The psalmist feels this tension and seeks release from it. In a resounding a powerful statement, the Psalmist cries out to God. God's response is more reassuring than ever. The Spirit of God will be with you at all times. Even when you fell alone and left behind, God is there. For us as the church, this promise is one of the most profound in scripture. We have not seen the physical Jesus. We have not crossed into the Promised Land. We did not witness the miraculous healings by the sea. What we have witnessed, however, is the everlasting power of God to continue to reveal the truth of scripture and the vision of God. We as the church live and work with the Spirit, the very presence of the living God. While the things of life may come and go, we hear the words of the Psalmist again saying, "I am still here..."

- How do we feel a separation or dislocation from God?
- Why must we live in the Spirit? How can we proclaim God's vision by the Spirit alone?
- What would be your final statement about God's presence in your life?

Closing:

Read the scripture responsively once more then consider the opening question again:

When have you felt God's presence away from a Sunday worship experience?

Close with prayer.

Psalm 139

- Leader: 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.
- People: 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.
- Leader: 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.
- People: ⁷Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?
- Leader: ⁸If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
- People: 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.
- Leader: ¹¹If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night,"
- People: 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.
- Leader: ¹⁴I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.
- People: ¹⁵My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
- Leader: 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.
- People: ¹⁷How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!
- ALL: ¹⁸I try to count them—they are more than the sand; I come to the end—I am still with you.