

March 25, 2020

Good Morning everyone. I hope all of you are doing well. I am keeping busy over here, which is good. It's keeps me from going stir crazy. Recently, I have been calling on members, working on worship for Sunday, spending a lot of time in prayer, reading books I have wanted to read for a while now, and participating in online meetings with church leaders both locally and around the country. I have also been reaching out and following up with members of the church and members of the community. If you need anything at all, please don't hesitate to give me a call on my cell phone. My number is 217-994-8588. That's 217-994-8588. You can text me, call me, or email me anytime.

Community Announcements

I have a couple community announcements that I am aware of:

1. I heard from Kent Kowal, our mayor and a trustee at our church, that American Water will postpone their rate hike during this crisis, which is great news.
2. The city council is meeting tonight to discuss granting temporary emergency powers and declaring a state of emergency. If you are interested, they are meeting at 6:30 at the YMCA gymnasium. There will be safety protocols in place there regarding social distancing.

Church Announcements

I have a few church announcements for you all this morning:

1. In case you didn't know, Session has now cancelled worship and all church activities through April 7. I am also working from home, so if you need me, please give me a call on my cell phone.
2. Lynsey and I are working on mailing out the Burning Bush for April soon. It is my hope to have it delivered out by next week.
3. I will be distributing my sermon and midweek devotional to people who do not have internet each week.
4. If you have a prayer request, please don't hesitate to give me a call or call Pat Welker and we will make sure that we get your prayer request out to people so that we can all pray for you.
5. Don't forget, in these times, I am not allowed to physically go to the hospital or nursing homes. If you or someone you know is in the hospital, please let me know and we can work together to find a way for to get in touch. Thanks

Scripture Reading

That concludes my announcements for this morning. Let us now turn our attention to Holy Scriptures. Our Scriptural lesson for today comes from Psalm 139. Listen for the Word of the Lord.

LORD you have examined me. You know me. You know when I sit down and when I stand up. Even from far away, you comprehend my plans. You study my traveling and resting. You are thoroughly familiar with all my ways. There isn't a word on my tongue, LORD, that you don't already know completely. You surround me—front and back. You put your hand on me. That kind of knowledge is too much for me; it's so high above me that I can't reach it. Where could I go to get away from your spirit? Where could I go to escape your presence? If I went up to heaven, you would be there. If I went down to the grave, you would be there too! If I could fly on the wings of dawn, stopping to rest only on the far side of the ocean—even there your hand would guide me; even there your strong hand would hold me tight! If I said, "The darkness will definitely hide me; the light will become night around me," even then the darkness isn't too dark for you! Nighttime would shine bright as day, because darkness is the same as light to you! You are the one who created my innermost parts; you knit me together while I was still in my mother's womb. I give thanks to you that I was marvelously set apart. Your works are wonderful—I know that very well. My bones weren't hidden from you when I was being put together in a secret place, when I was being woven together in the deep parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my embryo, and on your scroll every day was written that was being formed for me, before any one of them had yet happened. God, your plans are incomprehensible to me! Their total number is countless! If I tried to count them—they outnumber grains of sand! If I came to the very end—I'd still be with you. If only, God, you would kill the wicked! If only murderers would get away from me—the people who talk about you, but only for wicked schemes; the people who are your enemies, who use your name as if it were of no significance. Don't I hate everyone who hates you? Don't I despise those who attack you? Yes, I hate them—through and through! They've become my enemies too. Examine me, God! Look at my heart! Put me to the test! Know my anxious thoughts! Look to see if there is any idolatrous way in me, then lead me on the eternal path!

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Meditation

I believe that I've shared this with you before: Psalm 139 is probably my favorite Psalm. Yes, it is more favorite than Psalm 121. And it is even more favorite than Psalm 23. I LOVE the imagery of Psalm 139. I am fearfully and wonderfully made. God knows me intimately. God formed me in my mother's womb. I could go to the very end of all things, and even there, God is still with me. Darkness is the same as light to God. There is nothing hidden from God. I just could go on and on about how much I love this Psalm.

Psalm 139 portrays a God who loves us dearly. We see God as someone who will not abandon us, even when things get tough. Even when everything seems dark and like there is no hope, even in that place, even in the valley of the shadow of death, even there, God is. We are so beloved of God that there is nowhere we go to get away from God. We cannot get away from God, even in the midst of all the anxiety that is going on in our

lives. We read at the end of this passage, "Know my anxious thoughts! Look to see if there is any idolatrous way in me, then lead me on the eternal path!" David is inviting God to come into his anxiety and to lead him on the path that frees him from anxiety and worry.

So often, when we are anxious and nervous and worried, not that anyone can identify with those emotions right now, we isolate ourselves. It is so easy for me to retreat into a cocoon of anxiety and worry. In those times of anxiety and worry, we can become so focused on the problems that we have that we lose sight of everything else that is going on. We might even think that no one can understand what you are going through in that moment. And to some extent, that is true. I cannot feel what you feel. But in the moments when I am anxious and worried, stressed about the future and the health of myself and my family, in those moments, David invites God to know his thoughts and to lead him onto the eternal path.

I am not saying that if you are a Christian, you will never worry or be anxious. I think far too many people have heard that from their church leaders and been turned off from church forever. Rather, what I'm saying is, as Christians, when we get anxious, when we get nervous, in those moments, know that you are not alone. God is with you in these moments. And not only that, but God knows your innermost being and thoughts and emotions. You do have someone who knows what it is like to be you. You are not alone. I encourage you in those moments to pray that God sit with you for awhile and help you as you journey through your anxiety.

I know that we are living in anxious times. It is so easy to be stressed out and worried all the time. And Facebook and the news media and the internet are not helping matters at all. So, turn off your tv. Close your laptop. Set down your phone. Get up and go out for a walk; call a loved one and check in on them; read Scriptures; pray to God. Do something else. And if you find that you cannot do anything else in that moment, I invite you to remember that, even in those dark moments, even there, God is. There is nowhere you can go to escape God's presence. You are not alone. Amen and amen.

This concludes my weekly devotional. I will see you all on Sunday morning at 10:30 AM followed by our Zoom meeting at 11:15AM.