

The Cost of Being Known

In our Gospel lesson this morning, Jesus tells the crowd that following Him requires counting the cost. He doesn't sugarcoat discipleship. He tells it straight – if you want to be My disciple, you must take up your cross, love Me more than family, possessions, or even your own life, (Luke 14:26-27, paraphrased). It's a tough passage. Following Jesus doesn't mean we get all the answers, or a comfortable life. It means we surrender everything to Him.

I suppose some might wonder why anyone would make such a costly commitment to follow Jesus. It's because Jesus already knows us completely – and He still calls us by name. He knows the truth about our strengths and weaknesses, our gifts and sins, our victories and failures. He sees us all the way through – and He loves us anyhow.

This morning we're going to look at a Psalm that reminds us that God knows us completely. God formed us in the secret places of the womb. His thoughts toward us are more numerous than the sand. He knows our going out and coming in, our words before we speak them, and our hearts before we understand them ourselves.

This morning we're going to talk about the fact that "God Knows My Name." He knows our names. It's a reminder for us that discipleship means more than being anonymous in a big crowd – it's about being known. And He knows us deeply, intimately, personally – even better than we know ourselves. If you have a Bible or a Bible app handy, turn with me to Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18. **Read Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18.**

He Knows My Name

This was originally a song, written by King David. Look at how the psalm begins. "You have searched me, Lord, and You know me," (Ps. 139:1). God has searched us and He knows us. Church, what do you suppose "searched" means here?

David's not talking about just surface-level observation. He's talking about a deep investigation. God has a see-all, tell-all perspective on every aspect of our lives. He doesn't know just what we show on the outside. He knows our hearts.

I think that's reassuring – nothing I do will ever surprise God. But a lot of people may find that a little concerning, especially when we stumble into sin. The main thing here to keep in mind is this – like the crowds in Luke 14, we may be tempted to follow Jesus for convenience, or for a season. God already knows our motives. He knows if our faith is genuine.

I'm going to talk off and on today about one of the primary documents of the United Methodist Church, known as the *United Methodist Social Principles*,¹ reason being, there's a perception around this part of Ohio that the United Methodist Church

¹ *The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church (Revised, 2024)*, are located at: <https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-as-adopted-by-general-conference-charlotte-2024>

has thrown out the baby with the bath water in regards to what we believe, and what our stance is on social issues. In short, the United Methodist Church believes in the Jesus Christ of the Gospel, that the Bible is the written word of God useful for all people to know what God has done for us, and expects of us. The Bible is our guide for daily living, and our treatment of others is rooted in the Gospel.

He Knows Our Thoughts

The *Social Principles* remind us that living faithfully requires truth. We have to be honest. And have to have integrity. That's lacking in our society. In the section on "The Social Community," the United Methodist Church "affirms the worth of every person and acknowledges the need for honesty in how we live with one another."

God's searching knowledge keeps us from self-deception and calls us into truthfulness. People don't like hearing that. "You know when I sit and when I rise; You perceive my thoughts from afar," (verse 2), David says next. God's knowledge about us extends to the everyday, ordinary stuff. Our sitting and rising. Even in our regular routines, God IS present.

Brother Lawrence was a monk who lived during the 1600's. He worked in the kitchen of his monastery. He learned to attune himself to God's presence while washing the dishes. Think about that for a minute. Lawrence wrote, "We can do little things for God; I turn the cake that is frying on the pan for love of Him." God knows our thoughts, even in the daily routines.

He knows our "thoughts from afar." Not in distance in space, but in time. He knows the thoughts we're going to think two months from now, before they're even in our heads and on our lips. See, a lot of times, we think about discipleship as being a big event type thing, like VBS. It's not. It's about how we live in the day-to-day. The way we treat our neighbors. The way we spend our money. The way we use resources. All that is under God's loving gaze. That's why the *Social Principles* speak to economics, politics, and creation care – our daily choices matter to God.

He's Familiar with Our Ways

The Psalmist continues, "You discern my going out and my lying down; You are familiar with all my ways," (verse 3). Our paths, our resting places, are fully known. God doesn't observe from a distance. He's present, and He is familiar with all our ways. Think about that. The Creator of the universe knows your habits, your patterns, even your struggles. For disciples, this means God's not surprised when we stumble. He already knows. He knows when we trip, when we fall into sin, and He provides His grace to strengthen us.

This is a lot like what Jesus said in today's Gospel lesson. He knows discipleship is costly, and He also knows our weaknesses. Let's be clear here. Jesus doesn't call anyone because they are perfect. No one is perfect except God. He calls us because He knows us and loves us despite all the garbage we get into.

"Before a word is on my tongue You, Lord, know it completely," (verse 4). The stuff we say reveals a lot about us. In Matthew 12:34, Jesus says, "The mouth speaks

what the heart is full of.” God knows the word before it’s formed because He knows the heart that forms it.

For followers of Jesus Christ, this is a call for us to have integrity. The *Social Principles* warn against destructive speech – whether it be prejudice, gossip, or demeaning language. Since God knows our words before we speak them, discipleship invites us to let our tongues be instruments of blessing and praise – not harm!

God Protects Us

“You hem me in behind and before, and You lay Your hand upon me,” (Ps. 139:5). David’s telling us about God’s protective presence here. When we hear the term “hemmed in,” we think that sounds restrictive, but in truth, it’s security. It’s like those Secret Service guys who stand up and shield the President if someone tries to take a shot at him, only better, because we’re talking about God here.

God surrounds us with His presence, and His hand guides and blesses us. This is where prevenient grace comes in. Prevenient grace is the idea that God shows grace to all people before they’re even aware of it. It was an idea that was preached on a lot by John Wesley. Looking back, many of us can see times when God hemmed us in – protecting us from harm – steering us more and more deeper into His grace.

Think about discipleship again. In Luke 14, Jesus calls for radical surrender, but He doesn’t leave us unprotected. He hems us in with His grace, surrounds us with His Spirit, and lifts us with His hand. Remember Peter seeing Jesus walking on the water to the boat? Peter feels the wind and sees the waves and starts to sink, but Jesus reaches out and lifts him from the water (Matt. 14:22-33). We are never alone.

“Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain,” (verse 6). The Psalmist is in awe. When we think about it, we should be, too. God’s knowledge is beyond our understanding. We could live 10,000 years, and we would never grasp it fully. But we can absolutely trust it – completely.

Every Person is God’s Handiwork

When the Hubble Space Telescope sent back its first deep-space images, scientists saw thousands of previously unseen galaxies in a tiny patch of sky. The vastness was breathtaking. Scriptures teach us that the God who holds galaxies also knows us – by name. Thus, discipleship begins in wonder. The *Social Principles* point us toward reverence for God’s creation and respect for human dignity – both rooted in this recognition that God’s knowledge and care far exceed our understanding.

“For You created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother’s womb,” (verse 13). At this point in the Psalm, David shifts from talking about God’s knowledge to God’s creation. God knit us together, sinew by sinew, with intimate care. This verse speaks to the sanctity of life. Every human being is God’s handiwork.

I can’t stress this enough. Our society loves to pigeonhole people and groups simply because they are not who we expect them to be. We cannot follow the pattern of the world, and also follow Jesus Christ. It won’t work. The United Methodist Church affirms the worth of ALL people – regardless of race, gender, ability, or status. To

demean another person is to deny the Creator's craftsmanship. When we come to the Lord's Table, we remember that Christ gave His own body and blood for EVERY person – each one knit by God – each one known by name.

Verse 14 may be the best known verse of this Psalm, "I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful, I know that full well." Discipleship isn't rooted in shame. We won't win people to Jesus if the message we give them is that they're on the "highway to Hell," to borrow an AC/DC line. That's not winsome. Discipleship has to be rooted in praise. If we're "fearfully and wonderfully made," it's because we each bear God's creative imprint.

God Deserves ALL Our Praise

And God is praiseworthy! Telling all the great things He's done for us IS a winsome message! He deserves ALL our praise! We have to start getting in the habit of seeing ourselves as God sees us. Oftentimes we carry internal voices of criticism, self-doubt, and unworthiness. In God's eyes, you and I are wonderfully made! If we view ourselves that way, then we also have to start viewing other people through the same lens.

We have to see others as God sees them. He loves them! Our *Social Principles* remind us that discrimination in any form denies the worth of people created in God's own image. To follow Christ is to affirm in word and deed, "Your works are wonderful, O Lord."

"My frame was not hidden from You when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth," (verse 15), we read next. Here is a great mystery. In eternities past, before you and I were even even twinkles in our moms and dads eyes, God knew us. His eyes were on us. Nothing about us is hidden from Him.

As followers of Jesus, this means our worth doesn't depend on our accomplishments, wealth, or recognition. Our worth is rooted in God's knowledge of us from the very beginning. Think of that. Way back in Genesis 1, when His Spirit was hovering over the waters, and said, "Let there be light," (Gen. 1:3), He already knew your name. Wow!

He Counted Out Our Days

This verse from our passage also affirms God's concern for the vulnerable. He sees them. The *Social Principles* call us to protect children, support families, and honor those society often neglects. God's gaze is never blind to the hidden and the overlooked.

"Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be," (Ps. 139:16), David writes. God knew us before we were born. And He also held our days before we lived them. Think of that. He counted out the days you and I would live here below, and each one was given a purpose. Do we live each day to fulfill God's purpose? God sees possibility, calling, and mission in every person's life.

In the Gospel lesson, Jesus calls us to count the cost of discipleship. In the Psalm, we're assured that the One who calls us has already prepared our days – and has given us a purpose. He equips us for the journey He sets before us, before we're ever born. Look what David says next. "How precious to me are Your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them!" (verse 17).

David's in awe at the enormity of God's thoughts. They're weighty. They're worth building life upon. When John Wesley was alive, he had a daily routine. He would read Scripture every morning at 5:00. He said, "I want to know one thing: the way to Heaven. God Himself has condescended to teach the way. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book!" For John Wesley, God's thoughts were weighty enough to build life upon.

Aligning Our Thoughts With God's Thoughts

As Jesus' disciples, we're called to align our thoughts with God's. We do that by reading our Bible every day. He speaks to us today, through the pages of Holy Scripture. The *Social Principles* give guidance on how our faith speaks to real-life issues – justice, peace, creation care, economics, human rights. These are central concerns of humanity. After reading them, I don't understand why anyone would see anything disagreeable in them. They are reflections of God's weighty thoughts for the world that He loves enough to lay glory aside and take the nails of the cross.

"Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand – when I awake, I am still with You," (verse 18), the psalm closes. That's blessed assurance! However vast God's thoughts, however far beyond our ability to comprehend, one truth always remains – we are still with Him. Corrie Ten Boom, a survivor of Ravensbrück concentration camp, once said, "There is no pit so deep that God's love is not deeper still." At the end of suffering, she found herself with God.

This is the promise of discipleship. We may not understand everything. We may falter, but at the end, we're still with God. And He still knows our name. Think about the Sacrament of Holy Communion based on what we've talked about with this psalm today.

The One who knows our sins offers forgiveness. The One who knows our deep hunger offers His body – the Bread of Life. The One who knows our thirst offers His precious blood – the Cup of Salvation. The Sacrament of Holy Communion isn't an anonymous act. Each of us is called by name. We hear, "This is My body, given for you. This is My blood, given for you." At His Table, we're reminded that we are wonderfully made, fully known, and deeply loved!

Prayer: Lord, You have searched us and known us. You know our thoughts, our words, our paths. You knit us together and call us by name. As we prepare to come to Your Table of grace, equip us to live as Your disciples – honest, compassionate, purposeful, and faithful. In the strong name of Jesus Christ our Lord we pray. Amen.