

May 17, 2020



*A time
to Abide*

Introduction and Welcome

Call to Worship:

How do we know God is with us? The scriptures remind us of God's love and companionship on all of our journeys. So, today, let us praise God, not only for the presence of Christ with us in our lives, but also for all the brothers and sisters who walk with us! Let us worship together wherever we are!

Reading the Word: Psalm 139:1-10

Message: "Where is God in All of This?" Rev. Dr. Deb Hanson

Prayer:

Holy God, there are times when we feel as if we are sitting in a dark cave with only glimmers of light that seep in. Sometimes our souls long for the companionship of others, and we wonder how long we must wait before we can be together again. And then you remind us that we are connected in Christ as your children. Not only are we one in spirit, one in Christ, but we also have each other in so many ways. We also have you. Although we try to ignore your presence, we can begin to recognize that you are there, always, and you know us better than anyone else, including ourselves. Help us to abide in you, rather than try to escape. Help us to trust your guiding hand and loving heart as we journey even closer to a time when we can all be back together again as a congregation. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Blessing

Psalm 139
The Inescapable God
To the leader of David. A Psalm.

1

○ Lord, you have searched me and known me.

2

You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.

3

You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways.

4

Even before a word is on my tongue,
○ Lord, you know it completely.

5

You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.

6

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high that I cannot attain it.

7

Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?

8

If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

9

If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,

10

even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast



SERMON TRANSCRIPT GIVEN BY
REV. DR. DEB HANSON

“O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away . . . If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.” Psalm 139:1-2, 9-10 (NRSV)

During this time of self-isolation for many of us, how have we handled the age old question of “Where is God in this?” It would be easy to say that God has ignored us and left us to fend for ourselves. Yet, the Psalmist believed otherwise - not only is God with us, but God knows us. There is no place we can go that God is not with us.

Psalm 139 reminds us of our relationship with God and how God knows us better than anyone else, including ourselves. Early twentieth century Jewish philosopher, Martin Buber wrote a paraphrase of this Psalm:

Where I wander - You!

Where I ponder - You!

Only You, You again, always You!

You! You! You!

When I am gladdened - You!

When I am saddened - You!

Only You, You again, always You!

You! You! You!

Sky is You, Earth is You!

You above! You below!

In every trend, at every end,

Only You, You again, always You!

You! You! You!

(Martin Buber, *Tales of the Hasadim: The Early Masters* (New York: Schocken Books, 1947), 212.)

Buber’s point, taken from the Psalm, is that God is with us everywhere - EVERYWHERE! For some people, that is rather frightening, as reflected in a poem called “The Hound of Heaven” written by Francis Thompson. The poem describes trying to flee from God’s presence, but that doesn’t happen. In the end, Thompson recognizes that it is God’s love that seeks him.

For others, the thought that God knows us well and is with us in all things is quite reassuring. Jesus frequently told his disciples that he would be leaving them, but they would not be alone because the Holy Spirit would be with them to remind them of everything he had taught them. John 14:18 reads, “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.”

This is what we believe as the church of Jesus Christ. We are led and informed by the presence and power of the Spirit, the moving force behind all we do, unless, of course, we ourselves, get in the way. Jesus promised that the Spirit would be with us and we would never be alone. This is what gives us the confidence to bring our message to others. We know that we have a Companion on the journey, and that Companion has sent others to walk and work with us.

Jesus talked about this in John 15 when he uses the imagery of the vine and the branches. In verses 7-9 we read, “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.”

Abide is a powerful word because it means more than “follow” and more than just “being with.” To abide is a deep relationship, one in which the person learns from the other, trusts the other, and is aware of the other person intensely nearly every moment of every day.

I learned this when I met my husband. We have been married for going on 15 years, and even when I don't think about him consciously, I know he is part of who I am and connected to me without question. He is always near in spirit, and I am confident of his love and trust in me. It is that connection that we develop with God in Christ when we learn to abide in Christ.

Prayer, then, is our communication and becomes an essential part of our connection. When we pray for strength and wisdom, we begin to recognize the presence of Christ with us in all things. We begin to take on the mind of Christ and align our thoughts, words, actions, and behaviors in the way Jesus taught. It is a life-long process.

The love of God abides in us, and the goodness of God leads us in the path we are to follow. So, where is God in all of this? God knows us and loves us. God walks with us and provides others to help us on our journeys. God is in the medical personnel who care for those who are sick and are working hard to find vaccines that help. God is in the grocery store clerks who put their own health on the line to serve our needs, and God is with all those who are essential personnel who are there to help us get through this Coronavirus.

We see God at work in the ways people have started making masks, companies that have shifted their work to making important medical shields, in people who work at food pantries to feed the increasing numbers of people who are struggling to have money to buy food for their families, in landlords who forgive rent for a few months to help those who have lost jobs, and so many others who have stepped up to care for all of us.

Thursday's (May 14) prayer from District Superintendent Jackie Brannen seems to capture some of what I have been saying. She writes:

Lord, during this pandemic, life has become so confusing.

There is fear, grief and so much anxiety.

And yet, your Spirit resides within me. Sometimes, I feel you as near as my breath.

Sometimes, I long to feel you but cannot.

Today, I will trust that you are here. I will trust that you are with me even when my emotions hide your presence.

Today, Lord, I will concentrate on keeping your commandments and I will trust that the Spirit that resides within will help me with that, for I do love you God.

Thank you for loving me. Amen.

As I reflected on today's message, I thought of the hymn, "Abide With Me."

Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;

The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide.

When other helpers fail and comforts flee,

Help of the helpless, O abide with me. (UMH #700, verse 1)

May we recognize the presence of Jesus more clearly in all our situations, and may we abide in him every day.