

17th July 2020

Psalm 139

This is probably my favourite psalm, and one that I return to again and again. I love it because it captures both the awesomeness of the Creator who sustains every living thing by his word and the incredibly personal knowledge He has of us individually. In the opening verses the psalmist addresses God directly – repeatedly using the pronoun ‘you’: you have searched, you know, you discern. The prayers and praise are addressed to a God who is known and has a name. The verb ‘to know’ is used multiple times, and in Hebrew “yada” means so much more than we might think of in English. It speaks of intimacy and connection: God knows everything about us and longs to be known by us.

David asks: ‘Where can I go from your Spirit?’ And the answer is – nowhere! Wherever we are, God is present. I wonder if you were glued to your television screens, as our family was, when Space X launched their rocket carrying astronauts to the ISS a few weeks ago. We also re-watched footage of the Apollo 11 mission to the moon, which felt even more remarkable – given that it was over 50 years ago. One fact that is not widely known is that astronaut Buzz Aldrin, who was an active member of his local church, took bread and wine with him and celebrated communion while waiting to disembark the lunar lander for the first moonwalk. Perhaps that was his way of declaring that God’s Spirit is indeed present everywhere!

We are the result of God’s handiwork: his intricate embroidery, designed and formed with great care and the utmost attention to detail. He knows us because he wove us together and he sees the shape our lives will take. Again, the psalmist is trying to convey that each of us holds a special and unique place in God’s heart – we are precious to Him.

The psalm concludes with a brave plea from David: Search my heart and thoughts for anything which is not pleasing, LORD, and lead me on the right path. He allows himself to be vulnerable – submitting himself to God for the work of being conformed into His likeness. As disciples of Jesus, we also need to submit ourselves to the Holy Spirit – to allow him to probe our hearts and minds – so that we can become more like Jesus and live as he is calling us to live.

‘Lord God, we humbly ask that you search us and highlight where we have fallen short of your good plans and purposes for us. We choose to follow Jesus – the way, the truth, and the life. Amen.’