

THE HOUND OF HEAVEN

Psalm 139:1-18, 23-24

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LISTEN: <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/the-hound-of-heaven/>

Let's think about God. What if God is not up there or out there? What if God is everywhere? And also deeply within all things, at the center? This psalm ponders the mystery of God's presence—and the intensity of it. It is fierce and overwhelming.

Look at vv. 1-6. Ponder with me the arrogance of ever thinking we could do life without God. This is a persistent presence—when I sit, rise or lie down (vv. 2-3)—all of human activity. All my thoughts, all my ways, all my words... (vv. 2-4). We are “hemmed in” (v. 5), a term used to picture a city surrounded in battle. SO, gone is the myth of the sacred and secular. This is the essence of sin—building a world without God.

Now read with me the **second stanza, vv. 7-12.** I can't go anywhere that God is not God's presence even reaches into Sheol, the realm of the dead (the first time this truth is introduced in Hebrew scripture).. In fact, darkness is mentioned four times, to stress its all-pervasiveness. And yet, God has night vision goggles! It's all light to God! Here's a question for you. Is this comforting or disturbing? Yes! The greatness of God arouses fear; the goodness of God arouses faith. So if he is running from God, why? Fear, guilt, shame, ego? Why do you run from God?

Francis Thompson was born in England in 1859. His father was a doctor and Francis started medical school, but dropped out. He became an opium addict, slept by the river, lived as a beggar. At one time, he contemplated suicide. And then a family took him in. He wrote one of the most powerful poems ever, “The Hound of Heaven.” Here's a portion:

I FLED Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears
I hid from Him... 5
From those strong Feet that followed, followed
after.
But with unhurrying chase, 10
And unperturbèd pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat—and a Voice beat
More instant than the Feet—
'All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.' 15

But the psalmist isn't done. **Read vv. 13-18.** He already did macro (vv. 1-12); now he goes micro. There are billions of cells in the human body. They are all organized into systems. Intricate systems. Every breath is a miracle. We focus on what is going wrong with our bodies. The wonder is that so many things go right! Think about this. At the moment of conception, you had the package deal. You didn't have to come back in at age seven or eight and have your baby

teeth removed and order permanent teeth. It's all there in that tiny package! God is pictured in vv. 13-15 as the master weaver.

A little girl asked her grandpa, "Grandpa, did God make you?" "Yes," replied grandpa, "and about 60 years later, God made you." She thought for a moment and said, "God seems to be doing better work lately!" Yes. The wonder of it all.

Do vv. 13-16 teach the sanctity of unborn life? Yes. God creates all life with dignity and value and infinite worth, including unborn life. And born life is sacred, too. The millions living in poverty are sacred, there is a sanctity to their lives; life of the person on death row is sacred to God, too, and the 10,000 who have died in Ukraine since the civil war has begun, the 5 million refugees who have fled their Syrian homeland—their lives have sanctity, too. And so is the life of the lonely widow who called last week needing a fan. And so are the untold number of people who need to know about Jesus Christ and his forgiveness and eternal life.

God knows all their names. As you encounter people this week, as you see images of people different from you (different race, religion or politics), and you are tempted to hate or to be irritated with them, remember: their pictures are on God's refrigerator, too.

What if the entire universe is drenched with God's presence? And what if the incarnation (Jesus, God come in the flesh), was not only to show us God, but to also show us what it would be like for one person to live with a total sense of God-ness, present in everything? You see, it turns out God is good, friendly and likes you! God is redemptive, a word we use to mean God will rescue you. He comes after you, with unperturbed pace, following, following after with deliberate speed.