

## Being Connected

### Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18

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.

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

Even before a word is on my tongue, O LORD,  
you know it completely.

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

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

For it was you who formed my inward parts;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.

My frame was not hidden from you,  
when I was being made in secret,  
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.

In your book were written  
all the days that were formed for me,  
when none of them as yet existed.

How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!

How vast is the sum of them!

I try to count them —they are more than the sand;

I come to the end —I am still with you.

## **Being Connected**

Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18

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### **I.**

There I was, I can't remember which day, exactly, because this kind of thing happens on just about *any* given day. Everything was laid out on the desk in front of me: computer, cell phone, landline; I was doing email, researching on the internet, inputting data into a spread sheet, budgets and annual reports are spread out before me; there is a knock on the door, the landline phone rings, there is another call on my cell, the UPS driver and the office supply person try to make room for each other as they pass on the stairs; and, then, the alarm on my computer alerts me that I am late to my next meeting. I am, as they say in the parlance of the day, CONNECTED. Yet, the truth is, I have never felt more *disconnected* in life, and from my life.

### **II.**

There are seminal moments in every age, every culture and every generation. Epic, abysmal divides which place a person either before or after a particular event, epoch or era; and, which seem to come to forever define and direct both individuals and society, to a greater or lesser extent. For example, the landing at Plymouth Rock, July 4, 1776, the Alamo, the Emancipation Proclamation, shots fired at Fort Sumter, Gettysburg, the Industrial Revolution, Dust Bowl, Black Friday, Great Depression, the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the Cuban Missile Crisis, JFK assassinated, Moon Landing, and 9/11.

Sometimes, though, monumental change happens slowly, over time, through a series of smaller events, often more localized and less publicized which, still, can lead to, and culminate in, larger, more sweeping changes; even if one event does not directly cause the next they, nonetheless, still connect to each other to form a kind of critical mass for change.

### **III.**

In 1954, the Supreme Court rules unanimously against school segregation in *Brown v. the Topeka Board of Education*. In 1955, Rosa Parks refuses to give up her seat to a white person on a Montgomery, Alabama bus triggering a year-long African American boycott of the city's bus system. In 1956, the U.S.

Supreme Court rules that the segregation of Montgomery buses is unconstitutional. In 1957, in the first instance since Reconstruction, the federal government uses the military to uphold African American's civil rights as National Guard soldiers escort nine African American students to desegregate a school in Little Rock, Arkansas. In 1960, four African American college kids hold a sit-in to integrate a Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, NC, launching a wave of similar protests all across the South.

#### **IV.**

In 1961, the Congress of Racial Equality begins to organize Freedom Rides throughout the South to try to de-segregate interstate public bus travel. In 1963, more than 200,000 people march on Washington DC in the largest civil rights demonstration ever; Martin Luther King gives his "*I Have A Dream Speech*." A few months later, four African American girls are killed in the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. At year's end, King writes his famous statement about the civil rights movement: "*Letter from a Birmingham Jail*." By 1964 black voter registration in Mississippi has risen from 7% to 67%. That year President Lyndon Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act, giving the federal government far-reaching powers to prosecute discrimination in employment, voting and education. In December of 1964, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

#### **V.**

In 1965, King organizes a protest march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama for African American voting rights. Our shocked nation watches on television as police club and teargas protesters. In the wake of the march, the Voting Rights Act is passed, outlawing the practices used in the South to disenfranchise African American voters. On April 4th, 1968, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. is assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee.

Tomorrow, 56 years later, we will honor not just *this* person, but a legacy of so *many* people who, through sacrifice, determination, and vision sought to connect black American and white America such that we might become *one* nation, united in the principles of justice, freedom, liberty and a democracy fueled by the participation of *all* of it's citizenry. And, yet, as seen in events which have unfolded around the country these past few years, we realize, yet again, that there is a significant and troubling racial disconnect still very much at work in our country.

## VI.

There I was, and *this* time I can remember the exact day, Thursday, because it is not very often that I find myself sitting in a darkened house lit only by oil lights and heated with only the fireplace; no power, no internet, no connection *whatsoever*. Like tens of thousands across the state we lost power out at the cottage due to the high winds we experienced this week.

Unfortunately, it was not simply a matter of a limb taking out a power line somewhere miles from my home; instead, it was that *huge* pine tree right next to the She Shack that went down, snapping off the top 15 feet of the utility pole which is also right next to the She Shack. This is not “a” pole, but “the” pole from which all five houses on the point derive their power, leaving quite a mess including hundreds of feet of power line laying on the ground, pine branches all over, wires ripped right off my house, and the front deck on the Shack levered up at a 45 degree angle from the tree’s roots.







## VII.

It is not very often that I write the sermon at 2:30 in the morning. That is what happens, though, when you go to bed at 8:00 at night because there is no television to watch, no music to which to listen, not much light by which to read, and an awful lot on your mind when you wake up in the middle of the night to use the bathroom.

Other things happen as well, though, like you pick up your guitar for the first time in over seven years and get inspired to play in church again. You remember the peace which comes from silence and stillness and, yes, even the deep dark of winter. Mostly, you become incredibly thankful for what you *do* have: the little things, like a gas stove and that one cup Melitta funnel and filters you kept way back in the cupboard all these years; and the big things as well, like my neighbors who immediately came to help.

I have been, as they say in the parlance of the day, DISCONNECTED; and rudely so. Yet, the truth is, I have never felt more *connected* in life, and *to* my life.

### **VIII.**

While I went into this week's sermon thinking of Dr. King, the history of race relations in our nation, technology, and being so connected that we are become disconnected by our own choices and habits, spending a couple days in quiet and stillness huddled around the fire has caused me to consider those things which *force* a disconnection from our world, the people around us and, ultimately, from ourselves. As a white, male, heterosexual, and a "big guy" all my life, I will tell you that this was a bit of head turner for me. It is hard to understand disconnection until it is thrust upon you; in some form or another. Really, though, this is part and parcel of a much larger issue which is facing our society today, epically so.

### **IX.**

We are each profoundly and earnestly searching for connection and for community. Not the kind that Facebook, social media, the internet, and our cell phones purport to provide; but a more vibrant, authentic and, ultimately, satisfying kind of connection. Further, it is no exaggeration to say that our ability to work out what it means to live together in a world which has always been diverse and divided feels, at least to me, to be building to a crescendo,

The other day Linda shared with me a quote from Houston Smith; a scholar and author in the field of comparative religions: "*We work out our humanity in the cross-currents of relationships.*" I have been mulling the notion, and am left pondering the question of how is it we might find authentic connection once more; further, what is the *nature* of that connection, and what *kind* of community, ultimately, will such a connection create?

## **X.**

*O LORD, you have searched me & known me. You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. I praise you, for I am fearfully & wonderfully made.*

The words of the Psalmist, our sermon text for today, seem to celebrate not just one among many in the complex web of relationships which constitute our lives, but a connection to God which is *first* among many: a relationship which is at once primordial, mystical and complete, and something we *all* have in common. A connection which begins in the womb and runs throughout all of our days and all of our experiences, connecting us, both to the Creator and to every other creature in the realm. Such a connection does not help us *work out* our humanity, this relationship to God *is* our humanity.

## **XI.**

Born of this depth of intimacy, such a connection, such a relationship, in turn, not only *strives* to create, but is *compelled* to create a community which is carried out, not *virtually* through texts and tweets, but authentically through the *virtues* of hope, forgiveness, justice, acceptance, and accountability.

Such a community does not just *dream* of a world where little black boys and little black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and little white girls as sisters and brothers, it *labors* in order to make it happen. Such a community lifts up every valley, makes low each hill and mountain, makes the rough places plain, and the crooked places straight to reveal the glory of the Lord, and the glory of the connection between creature and Creator. Such a community, over time, brings about *monumental* change through the small and unnoticed acts of love and sacrifice it offers to the world.

## **XII.**

I honestly and earnestly believe this church, our church, *is* such a community. Within these walls and among these faithful, is the connection that people are seeking. A connection which begins first with God, the one who formed our inward parts; reaches across pews to other people, our brothers and sisters on the march with us; extends out to the larger world, in

such need of healing and grace; and ends, finally, with a connection back to ourselves, such that we can truly begin to understand and come to believe that we *are* fearfully and wonderfully made. *How weighty is such a thought, O God.*

### **XIII.**

Now, *every* church should be such a community; for that is the whole point of being a church. Sadly, though, this is not always the case. Time and time again, far too many churches forget that beyond the nine rings of hell articulated by Dante in his *Inferno*, limbo, lust, gluttony, greed, anger, heresy, violence, fraud and treachery, there is a tenth ring saved for the *disloyal*. In this place abides not only those few who have actively betrayed the trust placed in them, but, also, the great many more who simply failed, through sins of commission or omission, to defend and support those to whom God has connected them, and the community to which God has called them. So, the stakes are high in a church, because if real connection and authentic community does not first happen in a church, it is very hard to imagine that it would be possible *anywhere* else.

### **XIV.**

Fortunately and mercifully, the inverse is also equally true. *If* real connection and authentic community take root in a church, it eventually begins to flourish and, as we sang this morning, we become the critical mass for change and the *world begins to turn*. And any church, but especially our church, becomes *the* place where tears are wiped away, souls cry out with joyful shouts, tables are spread and mouths are fed, spirits sing of wondrous things, and God works great things in us. Because the promise which holds us bound is that through us, through our connection to God and the community we create, God is turning the world around.

As we go from this place today, I hope that each of us might realize that this, *right now*, is a seminal moment for our age, our culture and our generation. What we choose to do, or not do, from here on out will forever define and direct who we are and what our society will become. Amen.