

First Presbyterian Church  
Bozeman, Montana  
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June 3, 2018  
*9<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time*  
Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18

### **Through and Through**

You don't have to be a Facebook user to be aware of the controversy in which Facebook finds itself today. It appears that Facebook has been taking information about its users and selling it to the highest bidder regardless of who that bidder is. The information that we're talking about is as much about the data that users post about themselves, as it is about the online behavior of users. This includes the kinds of Facebook groups and pages to which a particular user frequents or "likes" or "shares" with other users.

Now anybody who is a user of Facebook and other social media knows that information like this has been sold to companies who wish to make their products and services known and available to particular groups of people. A couple of months ago we bought a new refrigerator. In anticipation of that, as soon as we had done some online searching regarding various models, advertisements for refrigerators and other kitchen appliances started showing up in my Facebook feed as well as in my Google apps. This happens often enough that it is no longer surprising. It's the American entrepreneurial way after all, and it's what makes social media platforms available to users at no financial cost.

What happened leading up to the recent controversy is in how Facebook took this another step further by enabling those who wished to sway political opinion to target specific groups of people with information and propaganda that was masquerading as genuine news. When this became known, outrage is being expressed for this apparent breach of trust. Facebook has been falling all over itself ever since, vowing to tighten up privacy standards and by becoming more transparent in its policies. It's going to take some time for this company to regain its reputation and to stem the tide of those vowing to free themselves completely from the Facebook platform.

Of course, our desire to know and to be known did not begin with the rise of Facebook and other social media. It is part of what it means to be human at its core. We are naturally social beings whose health and sense of well-being depends on our interconnectedness with one another.

Time and time again, we witness the results that come from those who are not in healthy relationships and who are disconnected from the fabric of society. The mass shootings that seem to be approaching an epidemic level in our nation are an example. Those accused and convicted of these shootings are almost always those who are disconnected or alienated from the common culture and from society itself. Loners, as we often call such folk, are seen as less than fully engaged and part of the larger world.

And perhaps what is most surprising in our day, is that with all of the communication and travel technology that is pervading our lives, it can be more challenging than ever for some to engage with others in meaningful and substantive ways. It takes energy, intentionality, and ingenuity.

At its best, when we are fully engaged and connected to a community of people, whether that be through work, or organizations, or families, or through church or religious affiliation, individuals who make up the group are strengthened in and of themselves as the strength and vitality of the community is also enriched.

What got Facebook in trouble—big trouble—is its breach of trust that is at the heart of knowing and of being known. I got to thinking about this breach of trust as I was considering the message that we glean from today's Psalm that we heard again this morning—Psalm 139, a psalm that speaks of creation and our creator God.

It's often a surprise to some to discover, or be reminded, that there are two separate and different creation stories at the beginning of the Bible, both of them in the book of Genesis. One is in chapter 1 which is the telling of the creation story as all having happened in a six-day sequence, with God resting on the seventh day, after everything had been created.

The second creation story is in the second chapter of the book of Genesis. And this is the creation story that has Adam and Eve in it—the first two people that God is said to have created—and that story goes on to tell about their lives. Bible scholars have pointed out that these two creation stories are from two separate sources and are completely unrelated to each other except that they both affirm and celebrate God as the source of everything in creation. Neither of these creation stories have any scientific or historical basis. And, in fact, neither story is intended to be a source of scientific or historical truth. What is at the heart of both of these stories is something much more important—a foundational theological assertion—that God is the source of everything in the cosmos. The two stories together provide us with a marvelous source of awe and wonder as we consider the magnitude of God's love for having put all of this in place. These creation accounts tell us this important truth that will never be revealed scientifically or historically.

So while it is sometimes surprising to realize that there are two creation stories in the book of Genesis, it can be further surprising to discover that there are other places in the Bible where there are additional creation accounts. These are places in the scriptures where we get even more insight into God's creative activity behind it all.

Psalm 139 is a wonderful example of one of those added accounts of creation in the Bible. For it is here that we read of the deeply personal and intimate relationship that God has with us as the one who created us. The words of the psalmist are uttered almost with a sense of awe and wonder:

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. (Ps. 139:1-5)

At first blush, these declarations about God's personal and complete knowledge of who each of us is might be a bit unsettling—especially as it relates to those parts of us for which we might feel shame or pain. On the other hand, though, when we stop and ponder the implications of God's total and complete knowledge of who we are can become a source of comfort and reassurance.

You know, it takes a lot of energy and attention to keep a secret. And added to that is the ever-present anxiety that the secret may be discovered or unearthed, with unknown or negative consequences that may result.

The comfort that we find in these words of this psalm are that there are no secrets. There is nothing about us that is not known by God. Consequently, we need not expend any negative energy or time denying that. And the very good news is that God deeply cares for each of us regardless of those parts of us about which we may feel badly or concerned.

I have to say that it's the second part of this psalm that we included today that is perhaps some of the most intimate words of God's deep care for each of us:

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. (Ps. 139:13-15)

The tenderness of God's loving creative activity is sumptuously and beautifully expressed in these words of the psalmist. It is a poetic reminder of this intimate love for, and knowledge of each of us who God has created. These words add a depth of meaning to God's creation, particularly as it relates to humans who are "fearfully and wonderfully made."

As Christians we take the ideas and truths expressed so beautifully in this psalm and apply them to our understanding and experience of God's love for us in Jesus who is the most perfect and complete expression of God's amazing love for us. St. Patrick who is legendary in many parts of the Christian church is said to have composed what is known as St. Patrick's Breastplate, breastplate here referring to armor or protection. One portion of this prayer is a wonderful adaptation of Psalm 139 as it relates to Jesus:

Christ with me, Christ before me,  
Christ behind me, Christ within me,  
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,  
Christ at my right, Christ at my left . . . .

Our closing song, at the end of the service today, puts these words and ideas to a wonderful Irish melody.

They are powerful reminders that the intimate knowledge that God has of and about each of us is a sacred trust that defines and gives meaning and purpose to our relationship with the one who made us, gives us life, and assures us of everlasting love and life by way of God's gift of Jesus. This knowledge and information about us is never up for sale or use by anyone but the one who makes and loves each of us.

As we come the Lord's table today in the celebration of communion this morning, we come at the invitation of the one who made us, calls us, and redeems us, who knows us through and through. And we come to the table together, united in a bond of love that marks us as companions in this wonderful fellowship and community known as Christian.