



Columbia, Missouri
The Worship of God • April 3, 2022
The Fifth Sunday of Lent



THE SCRIPTURE
Psalm 139:1-18; 23-24

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.

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

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

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.

If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night,"

even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is

as light to you.

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!

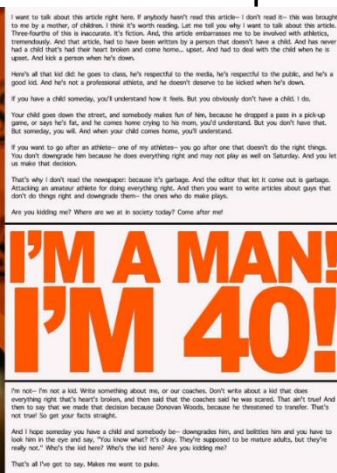
I try to count them—they are more than the sand; I come to the end—I am still with you.

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts.

See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

THE MESSAGE "Sacred Rhythms: Bringing My Whole Self Before God" Mark Briley

September 22, 2007. I was watching highlights from the college football happenings of the day, and a fiery head coach of the Oklahoma State Cowboys lit up a press conference following a *victory* of all things over Texas Tech. Coach Mike Gundy didn't comment on the game but went right after a published article about his benching of the starting quarterback. He didn't like the media picking on his young players. The line



that lingers for all of history and follows this coach most everywhere he goes was of course, [Gundy meme] "I'm a man! I'm 40!"

It has inspired many a 40th birthday cake ever since. The press conference went viral... one of the very first viral videos in college football to do so as social media was a new medium. Mike Gundy's offensive coordinator at the time, Larry Fedora, missed the blow up of his boss but knew something had gone down at the press conference. That night, Fedora walked across the cul-de-sac where he lived to

Gundy's house, knocked on the door and said, *"What the heck happened in your press conference?"* Gundy invited him in and said, *"I'll show you. It's already on YouTube."* Fedora said, *"OK, but what the heck is a YouTube?"*

Living in Tulsa for ten years after this moment... just down the highway from OSU, anytime a man turned 40, the Gundy memes went a flying: *"I'm a man. I'm 40!"* There were yard signs, birthday cakes, t-shirts, hats, recordings – anything you could think of. This was now fully part of Okie culture. And as I was coming of that age myself, this seemed to get thrown around a lot. The truth is what became a satirical gaff for most of the country was hard on many of the people involved.

Reflecting ten years later, Gundy said, *"That whole thing was harder than people remember, and honestly, it was harder for a lot of people than I realized at the time."*

While some saw his tirade positively, seeing a coach who would stand up for his players, others saw his tirade as bullying the media and less than helpful for some of the players, the quarterback, Bobby Reid, chief among them. Reid transferred away from OSU to Texas Southern and said of the tirade: *"It basically ended my life."*

It's been years of processing that three-minute episode. After four years, Coach Gundy and the former quarterback made peace with the incident and each other. Two years after making peace, Reid joined the OSU staff working in quality control for a couple of years – makes sense. Gundy also made peace with the journalist who wrote the article and continues to reflect on the evolution of his life and what it means to make peace with himself.

Gundy said, *"I see that guy on that video. and I see a guy who was going to work every single day with his fists clenched, feeling like he's gotta scrap for every single inch every single day."* Gundy can't recall the last time he watched the clip voluntarily, but he doesn't have to. That stalking, shouting, pointing man is permanently embedded on the memory card of his mind. *"Don't misunderstand, we're still fighting for everything we get around here,"* he said. *"But if I could go back in time, I would want to put my arm around that guy and say, 'Hey dude, it's going to be OK.'"* It's all part of what Gundy described on the decade anniversary of the incident as *"Ten years of realizing you aren't right about everything all of the time."*¹

Will Smith slaps Chris Rock at the Oscars – think of all that has followed already. Everyone has an opinion. and we've all been talking about it and posting about it. But how will these men, the violator and the violated, reflect on this event ten years from now?

¹ http://www.espn.com/college-football/story/_/id/20285966/oklahoma-state-cowboys-mike-gundy-reflects-rant-10-years-later

Is there any among us who couldn't benefit from some self-reflection of the stories of our lives? We've all got these moments... maybe when we fell, or stumbled, or overreacted, or chose poorly, or caused harm, or said that thing, or whatever it may be that we've either allowed to remain an open wound or have done some spiritual work to let it scar ... not forgotten... but healed over, learned from, stronger, more compassionate for facing it and growing through it. This isn't fully an age thing... though age brings some wisdom that only the passage of time allows. This is an intentional thing, a vulnerable thing, a come-to-Jesus meeting with yourself – if not your circles of accountability.

We're in deep today, friends. Not going to hide that. We're not playing in the shallow end of the pool today. *"We're far from the shallow now..."* to bring Lady Gaga into the whole thing. It's the poignant truth of the moment.

Next Sunday, we'll wave Palm Branches and recall the first gathering for Communion on Maundy Thursday and look up at the Cross on Good Friday where Jesus will stare back into our eyes. That's next week. Are you ready for that? What clutter do you need to clear in your soul, in your conscience, in your heart, in your relationships? This ain't no joke. We're in the deep end of this Sacred Rhythms series, and we've got to look deep inside ourselves.

Ruth Haley Barton has been our companion in this series. She calls this moment the practice of self-examination. She quotes Andreas Ebert who said, *"Many avoid the path of self-knowledge because they are afraid of being swallowed up in their own abysses. But Christians have confidence that Christ has lived through all the abysses of human life and that he goes with us when we dare to engage in sincere confrontation with ourselves. Because God loves us unconditionally – along with our dark sides – we don't need to dodge ourselves. In the light of this love, the pain of self-knowledge can be at the same time the beginning of our healing."*

This so reminds me of the regular question Jesus asked of those approaching him with a want, a need, a desire: *"Do you want to be made well?"* Such a piercing question. Well? What about you? What about me? When it comes to addiction and trials and the damaging patterns we create in our lives, we know it is often said, *"Until we want it... until we are willing to suffer the pain of acknowledging our out-of-control-realities and that the consequences of not healing are worse than the requirements of change (and even the loss of change), we can't really heal."* Do you want to be well?

There comes a time in our spiritual walk where one of the main things God is up to is lovingly holding up a mirror before our souls that we might see ourselves more clearly.

It's a sobering moment. It may be what Paul meant when he wrote to the Romans (12:3), "*Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather 'think of yourself with sober judgment,' in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.*"

It's time to take a closer look. Few of us may be excited about this exercise. And our culture is quick to hold up a different mirror before God can get the true mirror to reflect who we are. Some of us have been so shaped by shame-based family systems or religious experiences that we don't want to examine the soul any deeper than we must. We fear that we will forever tread water in a pool of shame or remorse. Sometimes, our quest for perfection is so pronounced that we couldn't bear facing the truth of our own shadow sides without becoming completely unraveled. "*Just trying to hold life together by a thread, here,*" we say. "*Don't clip the thread or it will all come undone.*"

We all want to know that someone knows all there is to know about us and loves us anyway. We generally want this, however, without doing the hard spiritual, self-reflective work of being totally honest with ourselves.

King David – a significant psalmist – gives us Psalm 139, which would be worth a daily read if you're up for it. It is a psalm that is often read in poignant moments of life and death. It's the one about God knowing every bone in our body – even as we were being formed in our mother's womb, God knows the number of our days. It is often titled, "*The Inescapable God.*" "*Whether I walk in the thick of trouble or am flying high,*" says David, "*you are there.*"

At times, I wonder if David is glad that he can't escape God's presence or if he's really annoyed about the whole situation. "*Can I not get a moment of privacy, God?*" It's like a parent trying to use the restroom in peace with little toddlers running around the house. *They. are. always. there.*

While on a first reading, it seems David is asking God to investigate his life... see if there is any wickedness within him and, to quote another of his psalms, "*Create a clean and right spirit*" within him.

But, as Barton notes, this may point us beyond to a deeper soul level than simply, "*God, look at me. What do you see?*" She says, "*This may point to the fact that the real issue in self-examination is not that I am inviting God to know me (since God already does) but that I am inviting God to help me know me.*"

Instead of inviting God to help me know me, we tend to invite social media platforms to tell us who we are. We are dimly aware that everybody else can't possibly be as successful, rich, attractive, relaxed, intellectual, and joyous as they appear to be on

Facebook no matter what their exotic spring break posts suggest. Yet we can't help comparing our inner lives with the curated lives of our friends.

Facebook works with an outside company to gather data (*surprised?*) on the cars people actually own. They also have data on the cars people associate with by posting about them or liking them on Facebook. Owners of luxury cars like BMWs and Mercedes are about two-and-a-half-times as likely to announce their affiliation on Facebook as are owners of ordinary makes and models. How 'bout that?

What about musical tastes? Spotify reports that 29 of the 40 musicians women listen to most frequently are also the artists most frequently listened to by men. Facebook tells another story. Men have underplayed their interest in artists like Katy Perry on Facebook, but she was the tenth most listened to artist among men, beating out Bob Marley, Kendrick Lamar, and Wiz Khalifa – all of whom have far more male “likes” on Facebook. If you like to listen to Diana Krall when you drink coffee in the morning, just own it! We aren't making honest reflections of ourselves. A frequent quote of Alcoholics Anonymous members is helpful here:

“Don't compare your insides to other people's outsides.”

Seth Stephens-Davidowitz reported these findings after spending five years peeking into people's insides.² He studied aggregate Google search data noting how people tend to tell Google things they don't reveal on social media. He found when wives spoke of their husbands on social media, the top five descriptors for, “*My husband is...*” are “*the best,*” “*my best friend,*” “*amazing,*” “*the greatest*” and “*so cute.*” On Google the only one of those five utilized to complete that phrase was “*amazing.*” The other top responses? “*My husband is... “a jerk,” “annoying,” and “mean.”* Davidowitz's research data of five years was surprisingly comforting to him. He felt less alone in his insecurities, anxieties, and struggles. He trusts Google's autocomplete far more than people's social media posts. “*Type in “I always...” he writes, “and see the Google suggestions that arise based on other people's searches. “I always feel tired” or “I always feel bloated...”* are top searches which is a stark contrast to social media where everybody “*always*” seems to be on a Caribbean vacation. Don't let social media be the primary investigator of your life. Invite God to help you know you better.

If God truly knows us better than any human ever possibly can, then let's open our lives fully in God's presence. Use Psalm 139 as a daily review. This self-examination is an ancient tradition known as the examen of consciousness. This may take only a few minutes at the close of every day, asking ourselves, “*How was God present with me today?*” “*What promptings did I notice?*” “*How did I respond or not respond?*”

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/06/opinion/sunday/dont-let-facebook-make-you-miserable.html>

This may be harder at first, but with a little consistency, the examen will begin to shift the way we encounter the world during the day. We'll start looking at the world with new eyes and with more reflective vision.

The psalm also helps us consider the goodness of our lives... celebrating it in all our fearfully-and-wonderfully-made-ness. *"How is my very being a blessing today? My body? My soul? My relationships?"*

This self-examen then leads to our own awakening to the darkness within. This is harder of course, and more vulnerable. It's hard to acknowledge that we have a shadow side. But David, confident that God has created him as deeply good, is also able to let the parts that are confusing even to himself come into the light of God's presence, so that God can show him how to confront his shadow side. *"Search me, God, know me, check me on the wicked stuff, cleanse me and move me into the everlasting way."*

In part, this is David acknowledging as he does in this psalm: *"Even the darkness is not dark to you."* God can deal... and God invites us to face it, too... then, and only then, can we begin to imagine healing. Confession is the only impetus to forgiveness. Can we get there? Are we willing to go to those depths with God? with ourselves?

Ram Das says, *"Something in you dies when you bear the unbearable. And it is only in that dark night of the soul that you are prepared to see as God sees and to love as God loves."*

This is what Richard Rohr calls essential to the classic *"spiritual schedule"* of our lives. *"Some event, person, death, idea, or relationship will enter your life with which you simply cannot cope using your present skill set, acquired knowledge, or willpower."*³ He says this will lead us to the edge of our own private resources. We must *"lose"* at something. It's the only way that the mysterious grace of God can get to us to change. It is only there that we let go of our egocentric preoccupations and are willing to go deeper. We've got to be out of the driver's seat for a while or we never learn to relinquish control.

The Gospels show us better than anything else that life is tragic but graciously shows us that we can not only survive but, more importantly, grow from the tragedy. Joseph Campbell says, *"Where you stumble, there lies your treasure."*

³ From Rohr's Center for Action and Contemplation: Meditations@cac.org. March 31, 2019.

Julian of Norwich says it even better: “*First there is the fall, and then we recover from the fall – and **both** are the mercy of God.*”

This is the journey we’re on. “*God, search me. God, help me see me as you see me. Help me to know myself honestly so that I can become my best self for you, and my family and my community and the world.*”

This is what it means to bring our whole selves before God. No matter your age or stage... 14, 40, 60, 80, 100... that number doesn’t make you who you are. It doesn’t define your manhood or womanhood or personhood. What matters is the willingness to examine what is real and true... about us... about God... and pray our lives forward into greater health, understanding, and wholeness.

I want to close this morning with what is called “*The Prayer of Abandonment*” by Brother Charles de Foucauld, who wrestled with what it meant to bring the entirety of himself before God some 150 years ago. May you, with a spirit of openness, allow his prayer to be ours today...

*God, I abandon myself into your hands; do with me what you will. Whatever you may do, I thank you: I am ready for all, I accept all. Let only your will be done in me and in all your creatures—I wish no more than this, O Lord. Into your hands I commend my soul: I offer it to you with all the love of my heart, for I love you, Lord, and so need to give myself, to surrender myself into your hands without reserve, and with boundless confidence, for you are my God. Amen.*⁴

SONG OF FOCUS
“You Have Searched Me”
(Psalm 139 paraphrase by Ed Varum)
MUSIC: TUNE: GARDEN; “*IN THE GARDEN*”
AUSTIN MILES, 1913

1. O LORD, you have searched me and know
all I do, each thought that’s within me.
And before a word is upon my tongue,
O God, you know it completely.

Refrain:

And I bring to you everything I am.
So, my Lord, search me deep in my soul!
And, my Lord, lay bare any evil there,
and lead me, Lord, make me whole.

⁴ Charles de Foucauld: *Writings*, ed. Robert Ellsberg (Orbis Books: 1999), 104.

2. Each moment, each place, you are there,
with your hand of blessing upon me.
Presence without end, I can't comprehend:
God with me each day from its dawning.

Refrain:

And I bring to you everything I am.
So, my Lord, search me deep in my soul!
And, my Lord, lay bare any evil there,
and lead me, Lord, make me whole.

All sing:

And you walk with me, and you talk with me,
And you tell me I am your own.
May someday I see all you see in me

BROAD HEARTS BROAD MINDS BROAD REACH