

East Hartford
23 Ord 9/8/13

Alice O'Donovan
Dt 30:15-20, Psa139, Jeremiah 18:1-11

Extend the Invitation

When did you most recently extend an invitation to someone? Was it a formal invite, "The honor of your presence is requested at.....whatever?" Or, was it an informal invitation, "Do you wanna go for coffee at Dunkins?" Would you like to church with us, it starts at 10 o'clock, so we'll stop by to pick you up at 9:30?" We've all received and extended invitations like this

Unlike the formal invitations that we receive by mail, informal invitations tend to happen in the context of conversation, face to face, over the phone, via email, as well as the social media. Prayer is conversation with God and we join that on-going prayer conversation as we pray the psalms every Sunday morning.

This morning's psalm prayer conversation ended with the psalmist extending this invitation:

*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.*

I find this psalm utterly amazing.

How was it that the psalmist woke up one morning to this awareness: O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know everything about me, there is no where I can go to escape you. You knit me together in my mother's womb. And more.

There is tremendous depth of meaning in this word "know." The psalm opens and closes using this word "know" three times. First in his experience, his history, the fact, "*O God, you have searched me and known me ...*" then at the last in the invitation, "*Search me, O God, and*

know my heart; test me and know my thoughts.”

The Hebrew word translated “know” here is “yahda” which in Jewish scripture is often used in a sexual context, occurring first in Genesis, *the man knew his wife, Eve, and she bore him a son*. When “yahda” is used in a non-sexual context, it means a deep and intimate knowing, a profound knowing, of our hearts and souls. At some point, the psalmist realized that God knew his, the psalmist’s deepest hopes, love, fears, and passions, then he invited God to continue in that same deep knowing of his heart, his deepest self.

As an aside, and as pure speculation, I can’t help but wonder if it was this psalm that inspired these lines from the prayer that we know as St. Patrick’s breastplate,

“Christ with me,
Christ before me,
Christ behind me,
Christ in me,
Christ beneath me,
Christ above me,
Christ on my right,
Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down,
Christ when I sit down,
Christ when I arise,
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.”

Now a word of fair warning, this psalm is very near the top of my favorite list. I once made a retreat at a monastic convent in Roxbury, where the wise elder Sister who met with me each and every day of my week long retreat, assigned this psalm for my prayer. I am forever grateful to those good Sisters of St. Margaret, an order of Anglican nuns for their patience and hospitality. That week long relationship with this

psalm put it at top of my list, so if I over preach it, please forgive me.

The psalmist spends much of this psalm reciting what he has discovered about God over the years.

First, he has discovered that God knows everything there is to know about him. There is no way that he, or we, can keep any part of our lives or our selves a secret from God. God knows it all, the good, the bad and the indifferent. V 1-6

Secondly, there is no place where we can escape or hide from God. God is everywhere, in the depths and darkness of sadness and depression, on the wings of the morning, in the depths of the sea. Vv7-12

Thirdly, he acknowledges the wonder of his own being, as created by God. *“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.”* v 13-18

Then in a rush of over enthusiasm, he writes, “O that you would kill the wicked ... Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord. V19-22

Then he concludes his prayer, inviting God to go on as God has been doing since the psalmists beginning; *“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.”*

Friends, I am about to call us to extend this same invitation to God. “Search me, O God, know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me.” Friends, I’ve been standing pulpits for the last quarter century. In my experience, most church folks have managed to fail “wicked ways” pretty gloriously. Is there another way to say this? Nan Merrill talks about *“the darkness within us.”*

If psalm 139 is one of my favorite psalms, Nan Merrill’s “Psalms for Praying” is my favorite paraphrasing of the Psalms into contemporary and

contemplative language, so I am delighted to put snippets of her work into your hands.

How does she handle the psalmist's burst of over enthusiasm?

*O that You would vanquish my fears, Beloved;
O that ignorance and suffering would depart from me—
All that separates me from true abandonment,
to surrendering myself into your hands.*

Now hear the invitation as Nan Merrill has translated it. *“Search me, O my Beloved, and know my heart! Try me and discern my thoughts! Help me to face the darkness within me; enlighten me, that I might radiate your love and light!”*

Enlighten me, that I might radiate your love and light!

Friends, we heard two other lessons this morning that dealt with the formation of Israel as a people of God. Moses called the people to choose life that they might live. Jeremiah was given the vision of the potter, making then remaking the vessel until the vessel seemed to the Holy One, the divine Potter.

Choosing life, being reformed in the Potter's hands, is all about being en-lightened, filled with light, so that we might radiate God's love and light into the world around us.

So, let us extend the invitation to God, now and every day, now and several times a day.

Take up your copy of Nan Merrill's translation - and let us pray these last two verses together. Then let us take these sheets home and tape them to the refrigerator door and pray them again and again - every time we open the door.

Together now --*“Search me, O my Beloved, and know my heart!*

Try me and discern my thoughts! Help me to face the darkness within me; enlighten me, that I might radiate your love and light!”

This is what I would offer for our becoming in this the second week of September. Extend the invitation to God, our Beloved.