

2020 07 19 – Holding me Fast

Psalm 139:1-12, 23-24

Who would you say knew you the best when you were growing up? Was it one of your parents, a sibling, a best friend? Who knew more about you than any other person on earth? My answer to that question is pretty easy because I have a twin sister, Colette, and we spent our childhood years practically side-by-side. We were together so much that when I talk about my childhood, I often, unconsciously, say “we” rather than “I.”

But there were still things about me that even Colette didn't know. There were thoughts that I didn't share with her, fears about which I was silent, embarrassing moments that I kept to myself, and mistakes that I managed to hide. Even as a child I learned to keep secrets, I learned to stay silent. Why did I do that? What was I afraid of? I think sometimes I was afraid of being laughed at, or belittled. Even worse, I was afraid of being scorned or rejected. I couldn't risk the possibility of losing my twin sister, my closest friend!

I'm sure many of you can relate to that fear. It's one that doesn't go away, even when we grow up. As adults, we still yearn for love and connection and we struggle to share our deepest and darkest thoughts and feelings. We struggle to be vulnerable even with those closest to us, those people in our lives who know us the best. We struggle with a fear of rejection and loss.

The writer of Psalm 139 is obviously struggling with those same fears. But he has discovered a relationship in which he can be totally transparent, a relationship in which he is known completely, a relationship with YHWH, with God, with the Holy Spirit. He writes,

YHWH, you've searched me,
and you know me.

You know if I am standing or sitting,
you read my thoughts from far away....

... Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
a height my mind cannot reach!

What a gift! To be known, to be known so completely, to be known better than I can even know myself, to be an open book, to have someone who is “intimate with all of my ways,” to not have to hide even my darkest secrets.

Yes, it's a wonderful thought! But, at the same time I'm thinking this wonderful thought, my fear of rejection meter is off the charts! How is it possible that I can be known so well and still be loved? There are so many reasons that I could give for my unworthiness, reasons such as:

- My struggle to love my neighbour as I should
- My addiction, whether it be to food, drugs, alcohol, shopping, porn,
Facebook, trashy novels, work or even exercise
- The times that I have lied, or cheated, or stole
- My wandering eye, my unfaithfulness
- My inability to forgive
- The times that I have emotionally or physically hurt someone

... the list can go on and on.

Many of us have decided that it's just easier to hide all this weakness, all this pain, from our loved ones, from God and even from ourselves. We would rather stuff it down and take our secrets with us to our grave than risk being vulnerable, than risk the possibility of loss.

The psalmist, no doubt has similar thoughts, but he has discovered that trying to hide from YHWH, from God, doesn't work. He writes:

Where could I run from your Spirit?

Where could I flee from your presence?

If I go up to the heavens, you're there;

if I make my bed in Death, you're already there.

The psalmist knows from experience that God is with him wherever he is. As Carl Jung said, "Bidden or not bidden, God is present." God is with us in our darkest places and in our most joyous moments. We are not alone.

<https://www.wildgoosestudio.com/product/bidden-not-bidden-god-present/>

Even when I try to hide from my problems by running away, physically, emotionally or spiritually, the psalmist tells us, even there God's hand will guide me, even there YHWH's mighty hand is holding me fast, holding me with love, a love that will never let me go.

I searched the Internet for images of God "holding me fast." The problem is that no matter what image I found it really didn't represent the pure loving energy, the grace, that is the Spirit of God. So I settled with earthly images: the image of a

father holding his tiny infant, the image of a mother holding her child, the image of two hands reaching out, and finally, to get away from the idea of God in human form, I have included the image of a boat held fast to its moorings.

The psalmist knows what it feels like to be held fast by God, to be loved unconditionally, to be forgiven no matter what he does. That feeling, that love is available for us too. All we have to do is open our hearts to God, to turn to YHWH, to allow ourselves to truly dance with the Spirit. We have to be willing to be vulnerable, to allow God's love to enter even the darkest places within us.

Yes, it's pretty cool to be a twin and to have a built-in best friend, but in my darkest moments, the only place I can find true solace is in the everlasting arms of God.