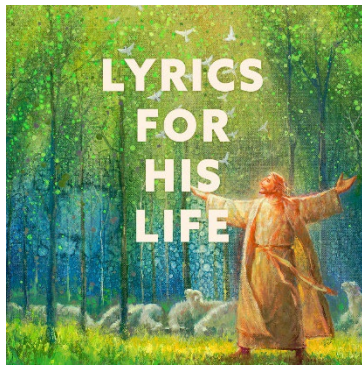


Lyrics for His Life, Pt. 1
Jesus' Wonder at Being Created
Psalm 139: 1-2, 13-18

**First Presbyterian Church
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What if we could pray *with* Jesus? Not just *to* him, about *our* concerns. What would happen if we stood next to Jesus, offering up the same prayers he made to his Father? What if we joined Jesus in the events of his life, then pressed close to him by sharing in his emotions? What if we spent *our* prayer time being engaged about what mattered in *Christ's* life?

I can tell you what happened to me. I grew to love Jesus more. And I felt *his* heart getting formed more inside *my* heart. I got energized by the urgency of his mission. I came to admire Jesus more than ever. Adoring him creates a profound effect in me. Peace. Passion. Hope. Wonder.

Could that happen to you? I mean, what if the best way to change *us* is actually focusing on Jesus? As it turns out, getting inside Jesus' prayer life lights up our prayers. Tucking up close to his heartbeat in the events of his life transforms our hearts. The closer we draw to him, the more Jesus gives life to us.

But how? Is there not an impossible gap between Jesus and us? Aren't the events of his life lost in the past? We don't know what he prayed so how can we join him?

I know. It sounds presumptuous and not a little crazy. But there is a bridge. A reliable, compelling, available bridge. It's built of two interconnected parts, the Psalms and the Gospels. They fit together so we can be joined to Jesus.

1) The Psalms. Jesus knew the psalms by heart. He prayed them, taught from them, quoted from them and understood himself to be the key that unlocks their deepest meaning. They are Christ's prayer book. Only he could pray them completely.

2) The Gospels. Jesus himself withdrew from the earth 40 days after his resurrection. But by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he left us the record of what we need to know about what he did and said. The gospels recount historical events in Jesus' life. But Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are not mere reports. Something else happens when we read that record in reliance on the Holy Spirit. These events from two thousand years ago become charged with present power. We meet the Jesus who lived then right now. These stories have immediate potency.

How can we link the Psalms and the Gospels? This will take some imagination. Not wild speculation. But consecrated connection. What if we consider which particular psalms fit with particular events of Jesus' life? For example, we already know that Jesus prayed Psalm 22 from the cross. We're very sure Jesus prayed Psalm 116 at the Last Supper. We know that people shouted lines from Psalm 118 as Jesus entered Jerusalem. We know that Jesus taught how Psalm 110 relates to himself. We see the bridge being built elsewhere in the New Testament as well. Jesus and the Psalms go together.

So what if we held up events from Jesus's life given in the Gospels and prayed specific psalms right into those events? We imagine Jesus praying that psalm as expressive of the meaning of that event. We know Jesus knew and prayed all the psalms. We know every event recorded in the Gospels happened. So the experiment this Lent is to put the two together in contemplation and prayer.

We pray the psalms with Jesus in the context of his life's events. We consider the psalms to be the lyrics left for Jesus' life. The Spirit inspired the authors of the psalms not only in the expression of their immediate circumstances, but so that Jesus would have prayers to pick up and offer to his Father throughout his life, especially during Passion Week.

That's what I'm inviting you to try this Lent. Pray prayers Jesus prayed *with* Jesus, as we enter the events of his life. Using consecrated imagination, we draw close to him to understand more of his inner life and driving passion. We've got 42 events and 42 psalms to link together. I found this life changing and I pray you will too.

Now we've got multiple platforms from which you can enter this project. The first, of course, is the book which you got handed today. It's beautifully layed out by Katie Robinson. It's got gorgeous art. It's got Scripture, commentary and personal prayers. The idea is that our heads and hearts will be linked. By all means, share one with a friend. And may yours get marked up and dog eared from using it

20 minutes a day for these 42 mornings. You can also get each day's readings sent to you by email. So you can wake up to the reading in your inbox. This year, for the first time, we've also created a daily podcast. You can hear the day's content read by Lauren Honea, Scott Graham and me. That way you can do *Lyrics for His Life* on your commute or a walk. Of course there will be the weekly sermons. But also our brief Wednesday noon services will connect a psalm with a Jesus event. Finally, but certainly not least, joining a community group will help you study and pray with others, always a great way to go deeper.

So shall we try it? Our Psalm today is an excerpt from Psalm 139, in which David contemplates the wonder of having been created. Let's take another look at it:

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 afar...

For you formed my inward parts;
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
my soul knows it 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 saw my unformed substance;
in your book were written, every one of them,
the days that were formed for me,
when as yet there was none of them.

How precious to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!
If I would count them, they are more than the sand.
I awake, and I am still with you.

What's This Psalm About? David contemplates the wonder that the LORD of all knows him personally and intimately. God perceives his past and his future. God beholds him inside and out. To the LORD's awareness, there can be no gap between what David presents and who he really is. God beholds him entirely. He knows him completely.

The heart of this song can be expressed in a simple but profound statement. *I am thought, therefore I am*. Why do I exist? Because God *thought* of me! And he keeps thinking of me. By his very regard for me, I stay alive. The one whose name is “I Am,” the triune God who is pure, uncreated, being imagined me. Then, he created me. He gave me a real existence. So I can joyfully say, “I am! I am me! I live!” But not because *I* could ever have made myself. Thinking, choosing, doing are all gifts from God.

This psalm shows me that the more I acknowledge the Creator, the more I appreciate the mystery of being alive. My praise of the Maker opens me to joyful gratitude. I rejoice, without pride, in my very life. For all glory goes to the one who conceived me in eternity and then enabled my mother to bring me into this world. I am thought—by God—therefore I exist as the particular person I am. Even now, as I draw the next breath, I realize that God maintains my life by his constant thought and care.

What Might This Psalm Have Meant to Jesus? We know very little of Jesus’ life before his ministry we began. What information we have is precious. In Nazareth, “the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him” (Lk. 2: 40). We can well imagine that Psalm 139 was significant for Jesus as it has ever been for young people.

Jesus did not come out of Mary’s womb as a fully formed little man the way some art shows! Jesus grew up the way we do. That means he had to learn. Like every baby, Jesus learned to distinguish people. He knew the loving embrace of his nursing mother. It was different than the strong lifting up of his carpenter father. Jesus could tell the smooth skin of Mary’s cheek from the rough beard of Joseph.

As Jesus realized more and more that he was his own, separate person, he may have wondered, as many children do, where he was before he was here with his parents.

Lying on his bed at night, before he fell asleep, he may have looked at his hands in the dim light, wondering at how he could just think of moving his fingers and they moved! Jesus would have tried to see how long he could hold his breath, or noticed the dazzling brightness in his closed eyes when he rubbed them with his knuckles. Jesus would have puzzled over where he went when he was asleep As Jesus encountered the death of animals, neighbors or even relatives, he would have wondered if they still lived somewhere else. And so where would he be one day when he died?

All the while Jesus learned about the extraordinary ordinariness of being alive, this Psalm would have set everything in the context of the God who made him. How Jesus would have known the fresh joy each morning, “I awake, and I am still with you!” Psalm 139 gathered up every thanksgiving at meals, every bedtime prayer, every song of the synagogue with the reality that he lived because he was created by a God who every moment knew him and related to him.

We’ll close now, by taking some time to pray with Jesus, to share his joy in being his Father’s creation. I’m ending early so you can relax into taking some time to settle into being with Jesus. I invite you to close your eyes. Still your breathing. Open your hands. Imagine seeing Jesus in a field, with his arms outstretched, joyfully praising his Father. Imagine that you come up near him. He sees you and welcomes you. He invites you to pray next to him. Imagine you hear yourself saying something like this:

Praying with Jesus

Jesus the surge of living flowed through you!
You knew the child’s delight of discovery.
I can see you laughing
As Mary blew on your tummy,
As Joseph tossed you into the air.
I love to think how you first spoke.
Did your parents keep calling things
By the funny way you tried to say their names?

I love to visualize you on your bed in the dark,
Or in the early morning before the house stirred,
Speaking to your toys, making up little stories.
I love to see you walking outside,
Holding a hand, feeling the sun,
Breathing in the scent of home.

I love to ponder how the awareness
Of your heavenly Father grew year by year,
To imagine your hearing this psalm and
Realizing, “I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”

What love of life you surely had,

How precious were those days at home,
Before the weight of the world bore down
Upon the shoulders of your soul.