

Reflection for Friday Morning Prayer Sept. 18, 2020 - Emily Friedman

Psalm 139:1-14

A reading from the 139th Psalm:

¹O LORD, you have searched me and known me.

²You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.

³You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways.

⁴Even before a word is on my tongue,
O LORD, you know it completely.

⁵You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.

⁶Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high that I cannot attain it.

⁷Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?

⁸If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

⁹If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,

¹⁰even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast.

¹¹If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light around me become night,"

¹²even the darkness is not dark to you;

the night is as bright as the day,

for darkness is as light to you.

¹³For it was you who formed my inward parts;

you knit me together in my mother's womb.

¹⁴I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Wonderful are your works;

that I know very well.

The Word of the Lord.

Good morning. Thank you all for gathering here today. When I first got the email about being a Friday Morning Prayer speaker, I was ecstatic. I said, "Absolutely," and I went over to my laptop to begin writing. I sat down and did a little prayer. I said, "God let's write something good." My fingers are on the keyboard and nothing. Not a single idea. I was like, "Come on, God! What do the people want to hear?" A few ideas started coming to me. There was the one time where I got nervous about something, then whatever it was that I was nervous about finally came, and then I was no longer nervous. And that's God's way of saying, "Cast all your fears on me because I care!" Yeah, that story seemed a little short lived. Then I thought of another idea. There was one time where I was feeling upset, then I started thinking about all the things I was grateful for, and then I was no longer upset. And that's God's way of saying, "Give praise and thanks to me for I am the Lord Your God." Yeah, another story that doesn't really pack a punch. Now don't get me wrong. I love sermons all about trusting God during hard times or expressing gratitude, but when I tried to write a sermon about these topics, they seemed too simplistic. Almost as if I was trying to say, "Yeah, I had a bad day, but God solved all my problems and I'm better now!" And we all know life doesn't work like that.

As I was struggling to come up with an idea, I realized something. The lack of me having an idea is actually a pretty good idea. Why was it so hard for me to come up with something to talk about? Growing up, I always admired my pastors and youth leaders. I saw them as these inspiring people that preached compelling stories. When I first learned about testimonies, many of the stories I heard were these grandiose transformations. As someone that grew up in the church all my life, my testimony didn't feel very exciting. If my relationship with Jesus was like a road trip, I've always felt like I was in the car with him. I couldn't pinpoint a moment where I felt like I was hitch hiking and I stopped by a billboard sign that says, "Hey come follow me" and Jesus swerves through four lanes of traffic just to pick me up on the side of the road. It always felt like I was in the car with Jesus, but let's extend that metaphor, shall we? Who was driving the car?

I wish I could easily say God was the one driving the car, but my pride and ego make me think that I'm the one driving the car. I think about myself a lot. If I did well on a test. I studied really hard. I got picked for a job. I'm very talented and qualified. I have a lot of friends. I'm just that funny and awesome to hang out with. I start to place my worth on earthly things. And I bet you can guess what happens when those earthly things fade away. I don't do well on a test. Must mean that I'm stupid. I don't get the job. I must be worthless. Nobody wants to hang out with me. I must be unlovable.

So how do we solve this problem of placing my self-worth on these achievements? Talk about it. Talk about it with God. Talk about it with a friend. Talk about it with a counselor. Talk about it to everyone at morning prayer. It seems so easy but it's not. Let's remember as the person recovering from putting my worth in worldly objects, I highly esteem myself on being independent, being the one that thinks she is driving the car. Asking for help is hard. Admitting

that not everything is perfect is hard. Being vulnerable is hard. Letting go of the steering wheel is hard.

Remember when I talked about how the only testimonies I heard were these grandiose narratives? Can you see how I started to putting value judgments on people's faith journeys? This person's story is so cool and inspiring, meanwhile I'm here. What do I have to contribute? The answer is more than I give myself credit for. I know that my story here today is going to resonate with some people. The type of people that want to plan out the entire road trip, even though God's the one controlling the GPS. I hope you know you are not alone. As I head into my senior year at Valpo, I pray that I continue to learn to let go of the steering wheel and let God direct my path. I know my worth is in him because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. The journey is far from over and I look forward to what is to come. Thank you.