

**Sermon “Every Step You Take”**  
**Kirk of St James**  
**Sunday September 7, 2025**  
**Rev. Amanda Henderson-Bolton**

As Chad can attest, the other week I was completely overwhelmed and trying to hide from our children! It had been one of those days where every second word was “Mommy can you...” The boys were fighting, the dog was following me around, the house was a disaster. I just wanted ten minutes to finish this really good book I had been reading. So, I didn’t say anything, I just disappeared upstairs with said book and hid in the bedroom. Don’t worry, Theo found me within two minutes (followed by the dog), climbed up beside me on the bed and continued to chatter for the next twenty minutes. It reminded me of the song “Every Step You Take” by The Police. In the end the book was finished!

Oftentimes an inability to get away from something or someone can be overwhelming or, perhaps even suffocating. When we read Psalm 139 today we find the writer unable to escape the presence of God. Literally everything they do from the mundane like sitting and standing, to even the very things they are thinking are known to God. One curious thing about this passage is that feeling the presence of God too much is likely something we have little experience of. How many of us have thought, “Wow God, could you back up a little, you are in my space!” If anything, we may be more likely to find that we struggle with what feels like an absence of God in our lives. We wonder if God is there or if God knows us at all.

Throughout the Bible we see God at work in the world in miraculous ways. For example, in the Old Testament the Israelites follow God in a pillar of fire and a pillar of smoke. The sea is parted, and the Ten Commandments given. God speaks to Moses through a

burning bush, and a stand off with the prophets of Baal ends in a mighty sign of God's power. There are countless instances where God's power is evident to the people who are following. In the New Testament we see God at work through the miracles of Jesus as people are raised from the dead, and the sick healed. Jesus rose from the dead. As believers in the modern world we look around us and we wonder, where is God at work in the world right now, in 2025?

Perhaps the idea that God loves our church community is something we can generally get on board with, however, I wonder if we were to look at our own lives if we truly believe that God loves us in the life altering ways that we are promised? That is where our Psalm comes in this morning. "The Psalm this morning begins with an amazing image of God as the seeker. God searches. God's search is relentless. God follows us everywhere we go. Whatever we do, God keeps looking for us, watching for us and observing us." The cosmic and divine God knows us as a person. No wonder the psalmist this morning says that this knowledge is so big and unbelievable that it is difficult to understand.

This Psalm also addresses a major theological theme. Theology is humanities search for God. It is one of the ways we try to understand God. As theology professor Ellen Armour states, "This passage invites readers to consider afresh the relationship between what theologians speak of as divine transcendence (God's distinction from the world) and divine immanence (God's intimate connection to it) through the traditional claims that God knows all (omniscience) and that God created all. Holding transcendence and immanence together is not always easy." Theologian Sallie McFague has argued that much of our theological

tradition has sacrificed a sense of God's connection with the world in favor of an emphasis on God's rule over the world and that creates distance. God becomes King and Lord, moving away from other imagery in the bible like Shepherd or mother hen.

It can be far easier to understand God in terms of Lord and King, and that viewpoint also sets us up for less disappointment. We have been struggling with this issue in our household lately. Our children have started to say little prayers when there is a particular outcome they are hoping for. For example, a particular toy in a Happy Meal or winning a game. Which when it works out is fine—but what happens when a prayed for outcome does not happen? How much more urgent is this question when we are dealing with major life events like a cancer diagnosis, loss of a job, or other impossibly difficult circumstance.

In my opinion, (and I would love to hear your own opinions), it is easier to accept difficult results if we feel that God is a step removed—because if God really loved us how could certain things happen? Lords and Kings are positions we can understand, and they operate on a level removed from our own lives. We can see God as “being in charge” or “overseeing” but not being personally involved. As I struggled to figure out how to talk to my own children about prayers and challenges this meant going back to one of the most prominent ways God is talked about in the Bible—as a parent.

As a parent we cannot always prevent our children from experiencing difficult or heart-breaking things. It does not mean that we do not love them or care for them. What it does mean is sitting with them in the difficulty and amidst the storm. Sometimes being a parent means saying no, “you cannot have cookies for breakfast” “you cannot bike straight

down our driveway into traffic” “You cannot stay up until one in the morning watching television.” I understand those are all things you want to do, and you think are fun, but it is not healthy for you. The is true of us as adults—sometimes we things we want or think we need are not the best things for us.

Psalm 139 teaches us about a God who loves us individually beyond our imagining. This Psalm could be read in countless different circumstances. It could be read at a funeral, in a hospital, as someone cradles new life, to someone in prison, by someone sitting and drinking their morning coffee. This is a message meant to be heard by us in all circumstance and at all times. This Psalm comes to us from a place of raw honesty and can meet head on both the light and the darkness of this world and in the best and worst places in our lives.

Psalm 139 is one of the most beautiful and personal Psalms that exists in the Bible. Whenever I get down, whenever I doubt myself, this is the Psalm I come back to. It is a reminder that each of us is known--personally known by God. That each of us has been called with a purpose. Everything about us for better or for worse, everything that makes us who we are is known by God who loves us. It is from a place where we know we are loved by God that we are better able to love ourselves and others. Believe--truly believe that you are loved by God and allow that love to help you love others in return. We are powerfully reminded that everything we do is viewed through the lens of God's love for us, and in turn that affects how we love the world around us.