

Bennoch Church: 4th September 2016

I wonder how well you know yourself? It might seem a bit of a strange question to ask, but to not know ourselves gives us a problem, because if we do not know who we are, we will have no idea how we will react in any given situation that we face in life. Not knowing ourselves, will mean every experience of life will be brand new, met for the first time, with no history of how we dealt with things in the past. We cope with life and all its challenges, precisely because life itself has taught us lessons, and slowly, we begin to understand who we are. Our identity, formed in the crucible of our experience and our relationships, is one of life's coping mechanisms.

It doesn't always work out as we would like. Mistakes are made and there are the sudden jolts in life, where we are knocked off line for a while, our equilibrium, disturbed or diseased; times illness, loss and the unexpected, and without knowing ourselves, we would be totally lost. No stability in a world of change. Nothing to hold onto, when life is in turmoil.

Are there others who know us better than we know ourselves? I am thinking of those closest to us, who have known us for many years. Maybe their knowledge of us, adds to the bigger picture of our story, and we to theirs. Their support to us in turbulent times. A presence more powerful than words. Those who are prepared, just to be there. Holding us, anchoring us, in the storms of life.

The Psalmist said, "*Lord you have examined me and you know me.*" These are powerful words about intimate knowledge. Where no distance is ever far enough. No action unknown. Silent words are heard and presence is so strong and deep, to be beyond understanding. Days are known and numbered and time stretches back before life itself. Some of this psalm, is intensely personal and its words, the summit of Old Testament poetry.

If we believe that God is the source of life, these words should not come as any surprise to us. The picture of our lives incomplete without acknowledging that God does know us better than we know ourselves. The creator, God who sees the invisible and is able to penetrate the inaccessible.

I believe that God reveals himself to us over time. These words becoming more and more true for us, through the experiences of life, both good and bad. Our encounter with God, having those break through moments, where he reveals to us this intimate knowledge of ourselves. Only the creator can do that.

The Psalmist I think must have been a man deeply aware of the presence of God, and someone prepared to listen in the silent moments, through the noise of life, in times of joy and in moments of loss. Without listening to God, we will never truly know who we are.

One of the themes of Psalm 139 is '*you can run, but you cannot hide*'. There is no place, no time and no escape from the presence of God. We cannot hide even in the deepest and darkest recesses of our lives? What lies there, that knowledge, is already his.

Are willing to be spiritually self aware, dig around the depths of our lives a bit, and get to know ourselves better. And to say to God, you know what, I don't need to run anymore. I don't need to escape. It does not matter, because God's knowledge of us, is based on one thing and that is love. Creation was formed out of love. The love of the trinity that overflowed into humanity. He seeks after us, no matter where we go, because of love. His examination of us, is not an end in itself, but opens up a path, a way to God.

"...even darkness is not dark to you, and the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are the same to you." (v12)

This is not easy. We need to be honest with God and vulnerable before him. But there is also a deep sense of security. A security that has strength, but not by power, by the compassion and forgiveness of God. The Psalmist is saying, through God's knowledge of who we are, he will never leave us exposed and standing alone in the world.

God could have left it there. His words coming from the mouths of Psalmists and prophets, but the story of his intimacy with us,

was not yet complete. *"God gave the law through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ"* (John 1: 17) In a moment of history, our knowledge of God grew exponentially. It was now heard in living words, witnessed in miracles of power, experienced through healing touch and revealed in an action that declared there is nothing higher, wider or deeper than God's love.

If our knowledge of God helps us to know ourselves better, then it also makes us more complete as human beings. Our knowledge of God is the foundation of wholeness of life. The Psalmist knew that. He is not interested in the facts for their own sake, but what lies in his inner soul. The deepest part of him. Psalm 139 has within it, strong spiritual connections between life itself, and its purpose. The psalmist knows he has been created. His creator knows him intimately, and so every aspect of life is linked to God. To him that was fact. It did not need to be proved. There is nothing in life where God has not been involved, is involved and will be involved. That is the point.

I wonder if we can share his words, with the same level of intimacy, honesty and faith? Here is knowledge that can never be contained in our understanding of place or time. For God's knowledge and love of us, is, and will always be, eternal; he is Alpha and Omega; the beginning and the end. Amen.