

“Such Knowledge”

New London UMC

Sunday, September 4, 2022

Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18 *NRSV*; Jeremiah 18:1-11 *Message*

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In Psalm 139 the psalmist tries to put words to something that is beyond the scope of our words: what God is able to know and do. Reflecting on God’s abilities the psalmist writes, “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.” That is so true, isn’t it? God’s knowledge defies our comprehension – our minds can’t possibly stretch to comprehend ALL of God’s capabilities! And the words that we have can’t provide an adequate, much less a full, description! And yet – that’s not the whole truth. While we know that our understanding and our words do fall short; it is also true that in other ways we *do* know God’s capabilities. We can feel this knowledge in the very core of our being. It’s as if we’ve always been connected to this knowledge of God and the constant presence of God with us.

I think this innate knowledge of God is connected to another knowledge that we have. I would venture to say that each of us KNOWS when we are feeling like our self, don’t we? There is a rightness, a sense of being ‘centered.’ And just as surely, we also know when we are feeling ‘off center’ and ‘not ourselves.’ Because when we’re feeling ‘off center’ it seems like we are being buffeted about, headed off course, or falling apart. In short: we are a mess when we are ‘off center.’ In contrast, when we feel ‘centered’ we seem to be stronger, more composed or confident, aware, and resilient. It can feel like we’re in our groove, or where we need to be, when we are ‘centered.’

We can expand upon our knowledge of what it feels like to be ‘centered’ as individuals when we work together as a community of faith and live our lives centered in God. Then our combined strength, confidence, awareness, and resilience is amplified beyond our own individual sense of centeredness. An obvious metaphor for our being centered in God is to imagine all of us joined together as a lump of clay centered on a potter’s wheel. When the wheel is spinning we need to hold together and stay centered in our faith and in God’s creative process. The true beauty of life lived together with God is found at the center of the wheel. But if we can’t stay centered in that life, we will slide off and spatter all over the place. We are truly a mess when we get ‘off center’ as a community of faith.

Naturally it takes work and commitment for us to stay centered, and for us to WANT to stay centered. We have to be willing to make ourselves available to God, and to go where God can take us. Because when we go with God our life can take shape in many different forms and sizes, that over time keep changing with different amounts of pressure and tension, fluidity and resistance, through working and reworking, vision and re-visioning. As the psalmist says, God knows when we sit down and when we rise up. God lays God’s hand upon us to form us, to guide us, to shape, and to start over, and to start over, and to start over as God determines. No matter how old we are, we are still in the creative process of living and changing in our relationship with God. Despite how set in our ways

we might think we are, we have not yet taken a final, fixed form that cannot be changed because God is still at work with us. As a community of faith, we are still a work in progress. As such, we aren't as neat and polished and 'finished' as all these glazed and fired pieces that you see here. While each of these pieces is lovely in their own way, and functional in their own way, each piece is static and without life. These pieces cannot change. Each piece has to stand alone, as is. The pot with a narrow pinched opening cannot be worked back down into a wide open bowl. The straight cylinder cannot flow back into a curved form. A short piece cannot grow taller. A tall piece cannot shrink down. None of them can readily adapt and change. They can't be repurposed without literally being broken up and the pieces glued together in a different configuration.

But if each of these pieces were still pliable clay – all of the separate lumps of clay could be pulled together. And all of that clay could be shaped into any shape. The clay could come 'alive' on the potter's wheel – to rise, and fall, to narrow or broaden, to become any form that the potter chooses. Pliable clay has potential – and infinite possibilities.

What have the last few years taught us? That staying pliable as a community of faith has helped us to respond to changing circumstances – and to know that we're not finished yet. God is still re-working us and bringing into creation something new. This has not been an easy process! It has felt like we're getting slapped and pulled every which way, and spun around way too fast, as things keep changing. But as things change faster and faster, our need to stay centered in trusting God's vision for our future grows greater and greater. Because God has the knowledge that we lack to see what lies ahead. And God already knows what kind of a vessel we need to be shaped into to carry God's love and care to our community and to the world. Such knowledge is too wonderful for us! How weighty are God's thoughts! How vast is the sum of them!

Yes, we already know that God's knowledge and capabilities are far beyond ours. But we also know that we are capable of staying pliable and responsive to God's guiding hands and to staying centered in our faith in God as this creative process continues.

Amen.