

“God Knows Us”
Rev. Jayneann McIntosh
First United Methodist Church of Wausau
September 9, 2018

Psalm 139:1-4

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 far away.
You search out my path and my lying down,
 and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
 O LORD, you know it completely.

About 25 years ago I saw a toddler-sized t-shirt in a catalog that read, “God isn’t finished with me yet.” I thought, great! That’s so fitting. Why don’t they make it in bigger sizes? Funny thing, though: I don’t remember ever seeing a child wearing one of those.

Maybe it’s the many clothing options available to us. Maybe someone in my community wore one but I didn’t see it. But I think it’s because no one likes the idea of imperfection – in ourselves or in others. We expect our parents and teachers, our pastors and police (at one time, I’d have said politicians) to be perfect. We expect our 4-year-olds to behave like 7-year-olds and our teenagers to act like young adults. And while we may not expect perfection of ourselves, we expect an awful lot and we’re disappointed, or frustrated, when we don’t measure up.

What do I, as your pastor, have to say to this? It’s terrible! And as a recovering perfectionist, I say it’s dangerous. For years, I expected more of myself and of everyone else than was reasonable. When someone asked me about my high expectations, I’d explain that, no, I’m not expecting perfection, but I was expecting that we’d do the best that we could!

The problem with this, in case you’re not a perfectionist, is that there’s no end to the work that needs to be done. If we always try to do everything that we can, there’s no downtime. There’s no celebration or sense of accomplishment. You finish one thing and, zing, you’re onto the next item on your never-ending list to save the world. Because as all perfectionists know, the world – or at least our small piece of it – will fall to pieces if we let up even for a moment.

To this, the OT wisdom writer says, eat, drink and be merry, because he’s come to realize that while we can each contribute to the better good, we need to make sure we actually live too. The letter-writer Paul says, “Don’t try to do everyone’s part, but make sure you do your own.” And while Jesus was our greatest example of doing what needed to be done – teaching about God through healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and teaching about justice and compassion – he also told us not to worry and he was good about making time for himself and his friends to rest and renew themselves.

Did you notice the verse on the front of your bulletin? It’s the same as that song we sang a few minutes ago. “God who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it.”

English class was a long time ago for some of us but I’m pretty sure we can hand a few questions. First, *who* began this work? *In whom* did God begin it? And what *kind* of work did God begin?

God is the one who begins good work in all of us. God sets us to live in communities where we depend on the ones around us for so much. God knows this is the best way for almost everyone. God places within each of us the compassion to propel us into our world to care for others and to care about the injustices we find around us. God gives us the tools to rally together to address those needs. And God reminds us through the Spirit within us that besides doing all of this, we are to take care of ourselves, living life fully. This is the good work God has started in us.

And – and this is the really cool part – God will see it through. God will be with us, accompanying us all the way as we work through the ins and outs of being human.

That means that however well we behave, or however badly we mess up, God is with us. God knows us backwards and forward. From before our first breath and beyond our last. And because God is faithful, God is committed to walk with us, no matter what.

Now, we put a couple extra pieces into our worship this morning, so I need to bring this to a close. We'll continue next week.

But before I end, what did you think of that prayer walk? What did you feel?

This will be our first week of having everyone pray our 903 prayer. Why do I call it that? And when can you pray it? It's a really short prayer. The idea is that you can incorporate it into your regular prayers; or if you're busy at 9:03 you can quietly pray this sentence, take a moment to listen, and then get back to whatever won't wait.

The idea is that God has great works in store for First Church. And by all of us praying together for our church, we are inviting God to begin that good work. We're opening ourselves to notice God's good work and readying ourselves to jump in and join in whatever wonders God may have in store for us.

Because – and this is important – God does have wonders in store for us and for our communities through us. So right now, commit to praying the prayer that the usher gave you as you came in. Commit not only to praying but also to paying attention for the ways in which God responds to the prayers.

And come back next week to see what people have put on the Breakthroughs Board. Maybe you'll even have something to put up there yourself.