

**"WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH THIS YEAR THAT'S SO NEW?"**

Psalm 139:7-24

I think I have shared this before from this pulpit but in case you were not here let me say it again- my Mother was a "pack rat." In other words, she saved just about everything. When she passed away and my Dad decided to sell their big three story house outside of Pittsburgh he began to pitch. He had been itching to pitch for years but just never had the nerve until Mom died. And yet her saving things was not a bad thing- for there have been items of all shapes and sizes and types that have come in handy or have been treasures found that I am glad to have. Like the Advent booklet that my Brother made when we were small children that I found and shared about in a sermon and used with my family this past Advent Season. If the truth be known I guess I have inherited some of my Mother's traits because there are times that it becomes difficult for me to throw things away, especially if they evolve around ministry- like files and notes that I have kept for years going back to my college days and religion classes, or

some books that I have inherited over the years that are in my office here at the church that I have never opened but have received from other pastors who have retired. I guess I just think one day I might need it or them or whatever. The other day I was looking through some files in my office and pulled out the file labeled "New Year" and I found something my mother gave me for Christmas, 1983. My Mom loved poetry written by Helen Steiner Rice and that particular Christmas Mom gave me a special collection of inspirational poems written by Ms. Rice. The collection is entitled *New Beginnings* and this is what my Mother wrote in the inside jacket, "Dear Mark, I hope that you will be able to use some of these poems in future sermons or if not that way that they will be an inspiration to you personally. Love, Mom." As I leafed through this small booklet I found one that is I have used as the title of my sermon today. I'd like to share it with you now because the title asks us all a great question as we begin this New Year.

*What Will You Do With This Year That's So New?*

As we start a new year  
 Untouched and unmarred,  
 Unblemished and flawless,  
 Unscratched and unscarred.  
 May we try to do better and accomplish much more  
 And be kinder and wiser  
 Than in the year gone before—  
 Let us wipe our slates clean  
 And start over again,  
 For God gives this privilege to all sincere men  
 Who will humbly admit they have failed many ways  
 But are willing to try and improve these “new days”  
 By asking God’s help in all that they do  
 And counting on Him to refresh and renew  
 Their courage and faith when things go wrong  
 And the way seems dark  
 and the road rough and long—  
 What Will You Do  
 With This Year That’s So New???  
 The choice is yours—God leaves that to You!  
 Helen Steiner Rice, 5<sup>th</sup> Printing 1973

As I think about the fact that we are only 4 days into the New Year,  
 2009, I’ve been thinking about what WE can do with this Year that’s so New  
 and yet for some, maybe not so new but something that can be a sort of  
 renewal. And so I’d like to use Psalm 139 as a springboard to help us dive  
 into 2009 on the right foot, if you will, so that we can begin by making good  
 choices as it relates to our spiritual lives.

So let's look at this passage and see what the Psalmist has to say that can lay a firm foundation for us in 2009.

But first, let me say a few things about Psalm 139. This Psalm is attributed to King David, historians believe he wrote it, and is said to be one of the most profound statements of personal religion in the book of Psalms. It has been best classified as a wise man's prayer and even though David's thoughts come from his own experience as a member of the Covenant family of God, these words have universal application. So what a great way to begin the New Year as we look to a wise man's prayer and hopefully make it our own. Let's set the stage for 2009 by looking to Psalm 139. And what I am going to say is not "rocket science" just things we already know but need to put into practice, four things we can all choose to do and seek to be committed to for our spiritual health in this New Year.

First, **take God with you into the New** Year- such a simple thing to say but a choice we need to be committed to every single day of the New

Year. One of the great things this Psalm tells us is found in **verses 7-12, for we are told of a God who pursues those whom He loves.** At some earlier time the writer of Psalm 139 may have tried to flee God, possibly due to some deep sense of sin. I mean, have you ever sinned and then you try to avoid God, maybe even run away from God, try and flee the intimacy that God wants with you? I know I have, but I believe because the foundation has been laid, the Psalmist, David, just like anyone else who has had that intimate relationship with God can experience a God who pursues that person. That is why verse 7 is such a great rhetorical question when he asks, "Where can I go from your spirit?" And the answer is, "Nowhere". And again he asks in verse 7, "Where can I flee from your presence?"- Which literally means, where can I flee your "face"? And again, the answer is, "Nowhere." And listens to this- if David goes up to heaven, God is there. If David goes down into Sheol, which is the abode of the dead, otherwise known as "hell" he says, guess what? You are there.

For God commands His whole creation; there is no place, no corner, no nothing in which God is absent; in life as well as in death.

Have you ever had an experience where you felt all alone even though you were not? I remember the day my parents took me off for my freshman year of college. After the traditional meeting with the President and other college personnel they said their "goodbyes" in front of Jeffers Dorm. This was going to be my first time really away from my parents for any length of time, all alone. Even though I was 1 hour away from Pittsburgh it seemed like 100 hours away as I was on my own for the first time in my life. I was alone, but not alone- because I remember praying to God that first night away asking for protection, asking for guidance, asking for His presence to be with me. And He was.

Friends, the bottom line is this - once God knows us we cannot flee His presence. He is everywhere, He is always present and He is the God who will pursue us, wherever we go, and wherever we go we will run into Him.

And remember this - we cannot escape Him no matter how dark it gets, not even the darkness of our own souls will be able to keep Him out, for our God is known as "the hound of heaven" whom will never leave us or forsake us.

Second, **praise the God who created and fashioned you.** Such a simple thing to do but something we can do every morning when we get up that can help set the tone for the new day. We find David praising God for His power, not by listing all His mighty acts in creation and history but by focusing on the wonder of God's creation of him. David focuses on how he has been formed and knitted or woven together in his mother's womb like a cloth on a loom. And as a result of his own creation, David concludes in verse 14, "I will praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully [or marvelously] made." People, think about this for a moment- who among us has not thought about the Creator God; who among us has not had a sense of awe as we think about the intricacy of the human brain and how it works or how a baby is formed in a mother's womb.

Do you know that to this day scientists do not know how or why an infant's heart starts beating; they know that it starts about 21 days after conception, but they do not know why. Have you ever thought about how the immune system attacks an infection? The scientific study of the human body only accentuates David's conclusion for he says at the end of verse 14, "Wonderful are your works; that I know very well." This is David's "Amen" to God's great works of creation, and he is one of them and I am one of them and each of you is one of them. Not only does God know us in the womb but He knows us even further than that. God knows our whole life, for David says in the second part of verse 16, "In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed." Our God sees the end from the beginning for He molded it, He made it, He fashioned it. So as we begin the New Year may we make Praising God a part of our daily lives.

Third, **give thanks for a God who is with us when we wake or when we sleep, in other words, all the time.** David says in verse 18, "I will try to count them [them, meaning the thoughts of God]—they are more than the sand. I will come to the end [or I awake]—I am still with you."

I recall in the movie "Bruce Almighty" when the main actor, Jim Carry, decides that receiving prayers would be better as sticky notes then coming through his thoughts and the whole scene is then covered with millions of sticky notes. You see, even when we have lost consciousness of God when we sleep, God never loses consciousness of us. To have a heavenly Father who, as the scriptures say in Psalm 121, verse 4, "will neither slumber nor sleep" is a comfort and an assurance that there is no situation in our lives where God is not present with us. And that is why David praised God for God's thoughts towards him and God's thoughts towards us moment by moment are truly overwhelming. And just as an untold number of prayers go out to God each day, an untold number of messages come from God to

us, as He answers our prayers and intimately guides us throughout the situations and experiences of life. God will do this, if we only open up our lives and let Him in.

And finally, **submission to the God who created us.** David has turned the spotlight on his inner being. That is why he prays in verse 23, "Search me, O God, and know my heart." David is inviting God to become intimate with him, so can we. In essence, David is only responding to the reality that God has already searched him and known him, as he said in the beginning of this Psalm. Friends, when we submit to God's working in our lives we are only granting Him permission to do that which He has already purposed. For as God knows David; David will know himself. And yet his goal is not self-knowledge but his goal is righteousness. And that is why he concludes this Psalm by saying in verses 23-24, "test me and know my thoughts." David is giving God permission to search out his cares, to look into those things that would challenge his faith and move him to sinning.

This leads David to say in verse 24, "See if there is any wicked way in me."

David wants to be corrected and he wants to be restored and that is why he concludes in verse 24, "and lead me in the way everlasting." David has come from God, God has formed him and created him in his mother's womb and when he dies, he wants to go back to God, and for the way everlasting is the way home to God, to the Heavenly Father's heart.

The bottom line is this- God created us in our mothers' wombs, God knows us. God knows our thoughts. God hears our words. God knows us when we sit down and when we stand up. God knows us when we wake and when we sleep. God protects us. God's hand is on us. When it is light God sees us and when it is dark God sees us. God searches us. God changes us. This is true intimacy and if we will but chose, if we will but allow God to become intimate with us, we can create a growing intimacy with each other.

Maybe this is new to some of you, but to others, it is something you have heard before. It is a New Year, untouched and unmarred, unblemished

and flawless, unscratched and unscarred. Let's make a commitment to choose to make God the #1 priority in our lives every day. We will not be sorry. Amen.

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Introduction: A "pack rat"

Psalm 139- a springboard to help us dive into 2009 on the right foot

A few things about Psalm 139...

4 things we can all choose to do...

First, **take God \_\_\_\_\_ into the New Year**

Vs. 7-12 A God who \_\_\_\_\_ those whom He loves

Where can I go..., where can I flee?

Second, \_\_\_\_\_ **the God who created and fashioned you**

Who has not thought about the Creator God...

Third, **give thanks for a God who is with us when we \_\_\_\_\_ or when we \_\_\_\_\_, on other words, all the time**

And finally, \_\_\_\_\_ **to the God who created us**

David is inviting God to become intimate with him- so can we

Conclusion: Let's make a commitment to choose to make God #1 priority in our lives every day