

**“Whose Are You?”**  
Rev. Jayneann McIntosh  
First United Methodist Church of Wausau  
September 30, 2018

Psalm 139:13-18

For it was you who formed my inward parts;  
    you knit me together in my mother’s womb.  
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.  
    Wonderful are your works;  
that I know very well.  
    My frame was not hidden from you,  
when I was being made in secret,  
    intricately woven in the depths of the earth.  
Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.  
In your book were written  
    all the days that were formed for me,  
    when none of them as yet existed.  
How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!  
    How vast is the sum of them!  
I try to count them—they are more than the sand;  
    I come to the end—I am still with you.

We used to play a game when we went camping when the kids were young. One person would name three things, anything – a horse named Galileo, an overripe banana, and the Queen of Mars – and the person whose turn it was would make up a story on the spot using all three named things. Although our storytelling skill varied, we all enjoyed ourselves as we settled into our sleeping bags at the end of the day.

I thought of this game as I was preparing today’s sermon. First was the scripture Jack just read. I also had a prayer, and a song that Karmen played at Grace Wylie’s funeral Tuesday.

The song seems to speak from God’s perspective.

I will come to you in the silence, I will lift you from all your fear ...  
In the shadows of the night, I will be your light, come and rest in me.  
  
Do not be afraid, I am with you. I have called you each by name.  
Come and follow me, I will bring you home; I love you and you are mine.<sup>i</sup>

The prayer is from Pastor Karen’s book of prayers. Perhaps thinking of the old gospel hymn she began, “I am thine, O Lord. I am whose?” She invites us into a time of silent prayer, praying just that phrase, “I am thine, O Lord.” ... Then:

I am thine... I am your child. I am held in your embrace, I am secure in my trust of you.  
  
I am thine... I belong to you like a bird belongs to the air – it is in you that I am most at home, and most free to do what I am meant to do. ...<sup>ii</sup>

A song. A prayer. A scripture lesson:

You created every part of me;  
you put me together in my mother's womb. ...  
you saw me before I was born.

We're in our fourth week in a series called Works-in-Progress. Today we talk about our response to God's attentiveness. We also look at the fear that can keep us from being all that God knows we can be, and how to dismantle it.

This month, we began praying our Breakthrough Prayer – everyone sharing the same prayer at the same moment. How has that been going for you? We're a congregation that believes in the power of prayer. But when we thought about it, we realized that we weren't praying for our church as much as we might. With our Breakthrough Prayer we ask God to do God's great thing in the life of First Church. We ask God to include us in the miracle in store for our communities through us.

Already we're noticing Breakthroughs, signs of God's activity around us. We've had more guests in worship this month than in any month since I came to Wausau. New people have joined the Wednesday evening study and tried out adult Sunday School and choir. Who knows, you may even find that you're called to join the CropWalk or to help in the church office or children's Sunday School.

God, the Source of All that Is, is like a potter working to draw usefulness and beauty from the clay. Our God, like the potter in the song we sang earlier, seeks to shape us to serve God's good purpose and to be a reflection of God's love and beauty.

We don't have to wonder if we're good enough. God knows us completely, has always known us. God knows what we're capable of and, like the potter, God works to draw it out of us.

What is our response? In what ways can First Church grow in our acceptance that we are God's handiwork? What is needed in the communities around us that God is calling us face or accept or address? What else might we need to prepare us for the great good work God has in store for us?

I suggest three ways of living into our response to God, as the fashioner of our lives.

First, we're called to live Godly lives. I'm not speaking of impossible human perfection but, if you can hear the difference, think of Christian perfection as putting God first in our lives and living from that place, being Christ in the world in all the ways we can in that particular moment and situation.

Second, stop trying to do it all. Stop beating ourselves up because we're not perfect. Because we're human. God makes us this way. Our humanness can be our worst hurdle but it is also our best quality. Jesus was perfectly human. No doubt, he skinned his knees as a boy. He probably spoke sharply once in a while when the disciples were being particularly dull. He may have overeaten on occasion. He did not let any of this disqualify him from doing God's good work. Neither can we.

Let yourself off the hook. Forgive yourself; God does! And start where you are by being the you that is most authentic.

Third, accept your place in God's intention. Accept your place as a daughter or son of God, as much a child of God as Jesus was. He understood all about "You are mine" and "I am yours." He and the Father were one. And... get this... like Jesus, we are all to cultivate the Godliness in ourselves.

One early Church father explained it saying: This is why the Word became human, and the Son of God became the Son of man: so that we, by entering into communion with the Word and thus receiving divine sonship, might become daughters and sons of God.<sup>iii</sup>

We are fashioned to be sons and daughters of God, just like Jesus. This is a new idea for some people. New ideas can be scary. So let's talk about fear for a few minutes.

At the heart of every excuse to avoid doing something great is, likely, fear. Fear creates a chasm that can seem impossible to cross. That inner voice of fear can paralyze us. And if we don't face it and call it what it is, fear will keep us living in a nice, safe box. We stay where we are but we also miss out on all the potential for which God has fashioned us. We never have to stretch ourselves or take risks but we're in a box, missing out on new relationships, opportunities and the transformation that God intends for us.

We each have our own fears. How do we face them?

First, stop blaming other people or circumstances. Choose not to be a victim. Playing the victim may give you power but it's an empty, unsatisfying power. Instead see yourself as a person empowered by God as Spirit and guided by the wisdom of the Christ-light within you.

Second, turn around your negative talk. When people hear you say what you can't do, they start to believe it. And so do you. You don't have to delude yourself but pessimism's only helpful in keeping us stuck.

Lastly, it can be easy to let ongoing chaos in our lives keep us immobile. "I'll work on that once things calm down." But do things ever calm down enough that we actually step out into God's plan? To face your fear, how about starting each morning with the verse that's on the front of today's bulletin? Ask God to remind you of the power of Christ in you that will lead you through to the other side of whatever you have to face. Choose to look at life through a frame of possibility or hope rather than chaos.<sup>iv</sup>

Centuries ago, the Asian poet Rumi wrote, "Forget Safety. Live where you fear to live. Be notorious." If we think of notorious as being "known for a particular trait," let's be known for our fearlessness. Let's be notorious, trusting that "The One who started a good work in us will stay with us to complete it."

Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> *The Faith We Sing*, Abingdon Press, Nashville TN, 2000, #2218.

<sup>ii</sup> Karen Ebert, "I Am Thine," *What I Tell My Heart: Prayers to a God Whose Compassion Never Ends*, 1998, Providence House, Franklin TN, 98-9.

<sup>iii</sup> Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adversus haereses*, 3.19.1. Inclusive language, my own.

<sup>iv</sup> Ideas on fear come from Sue Nilson Kibbey, *Flood Gates: Holy Momentum for a Fearless Church*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 2016, 16-22.