

By: Rev. Wendy Depew Partelow

Rev. Wendy Depew Partelow is Vice President of the American Baptist Churches of New York State Board of Missions.

**On Psalm 139**

The Psalmist begins: “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...and are acquainted with all my ways.” And at the end the Psalmist prays: “Search me O God and know my heart, try me and know my thoughts and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” In between what happens is that the Psalmist acknowledges that God knows everything about us.

God knows the very things we try to hide from the world: our insecurities, *and* the thoughts and sins that enter our lives and minds sometimes unwillingly and unbidden; as well as those we *choose* to commit and justify.



S/he details all of the ways God is with us, and God’s presence is among us. Most importantly it is stressed that there is nowhere we can hide: we cannot escape God’s gaze. It is our own self-loathing that makes us want to, our own wretchedness that keeps us holding ourselves apart.

Nadia Bolz-Weber in her book *Accidental Saints: Finding God in all the Wrong People*, writes a chapter that focuses on Jesus washing the disciples feet on the night before his crucifixion. She says, “Hours before his disciples betrayed, denied, and abandoned him, Jesus washed their filthy feet. He knew what was going to go down...As he knelt before his friends and washed their feet [an act of the total submission of a slave] he knew that very night they would do the thing

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that would torture them for the rest of their lives. They would deny, betray, and hand over their own friend and teacher. They would *not* be the men and women they wanted to be.” (p. 133). I mention this because we too, are not always the men and women that we want to be. We act and later on regret our actions. *And*, we have a hard time accepting our humanity, our imperfection. But here’s the thing, God doesn’t expect us to be *perfect*, just *faithful*.

The disciples weren’t perfect by any stretch of the imagination, but God chose them anyway. God chose them because God made them, in their mother’s womb God formed them, as God has formed us, formed me, with all of my imperfections. ...*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.* (Psalm 139:15b-16)

God is personal. God is relational. God is loving Father *and* birthing Mother (Chittister). God is the ground of our being. (Chittister, 16). God loves me as I long to be loved: freely, unreservedly, reliably, accountably, unconditionally, completely.

God searches me. God knows me, God *formed me in my inward parts*. God knows what makes me ‘tick.’ And God knows you too, just as intimately, just as fully, just as completely.

And God frees us all from the bondage we impose on ourselves. (Bolz-Weber, 133) God frees us from that self-loathing and wretchedness that keeps us separated from God. God does that because we are God’s creation, God’s handiwork.

*God formed you in your inward parts, knit you together in your mother’s womb -* knows you through and through. You are *intricately woven* on God’s loom. Every strand carefully chosen by God to make you YOU! And you are wonderfully made. You are God’s beloved, NOW, just as you are!

Own it, embrace it, and know it fully, for you are fully known and loved beyond all understanding and reason! And in response, as God’s faithful, imperfect, people let us pray: *Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.* And God does, and has, and will.

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#### References:

Nadia Bolz-Weber, *Accidental Saints: Finding God in All the Wrong People*, Penguin

RandomHouse LLC, 2015.

Joan Chittister, *Scarred by Struggle, Transformed by Hope*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub., 2005

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