

The Rev. Dr. Charley Reeb:

As was mentioned earlier, we are thrilled that Ms. Tiffany McClure is going to join us tomorrow as our new director of children's ministry. And as was mentioned, she was in Sunday school, but she's also here in worship.

And so, I'm going to embarrass her and her family and invite them to stand real quick so we can recognize them. Hey there.

Wow. I guess, we're in the dark now, huh? Well, if we seem a little tired today, it's because Alan and I, we were at the Braves game last night. Amen.

That's right. It was exciting. That place was electric. Of course, I was a little tired after the electricity. It took us an hour to get out of Truist Park, but I prayed through it.

But we had a good time. Again, you can imagine the stadium, the energy was palpable and tangible. We were all brought together. I've always loved how the whole stadium becomes as one because of the Braves and what they do.

During pivotal moments of the game, we all rise up as one so they can get that third out or score the go-ahead run. And of course, my gosh, we rose to our feet, we high five complete strangers.

Isn't that funny? All of a sudden the person sitting next to you is your best friend in a Braves game. Yeah, this is great. And we high five one another as Austin Riley stepped up to the plate and knocked in that game-winning run. It was tremendous. It was a rush. The Braves' victory brought us together.

But you know what? As wonderful as a Braves' victory really is, it is nothing compared to the victory having Jesus Christ. Amen. On the cross, Jesus defeated sin and suffering, death and evil.

He rose again to bring us newness of life. His victory brings all of us together here today. And so, when we rise up, you knew that was coming, we rise up and pledge and serve and give and pray. We are reminding this community of our eternal champion of Jesus Christ.

And so, I encourage you to pledge. You should have received a letter in the mail this week. If you haven't, you'll receive it soon with the pledge card and prayerfully consider how you can pledge, how you can rise up now more than ever to commit to God and His church because there is nothing more important than what we do here at Johns Creek United Methodist Church, in the name of God. So, thank you for prayerfully considering that.

As I transition into the message and the text I'd like to read for you today. I'll never forget, a friend of mine told me that he had the opportunity to have lunch with the Dr. Billy Graham, the late Billy Graham. Imagine that opportunity.

And when he was sitting next to him at lunch, he asked him a question that he always wanted to ask Dr. Graham. He said, "Dr. Graham, I have to ask you this. I know you've preached to thousands and thousands of people all over the world, the stadiums and to arenas. And my gosh, whenever you preach, you're very confident that you're preaching the very word of Almighty God. But how do you know when you're preaching that it's the word of God and not just your own idea?"

And Dr. Graham said, "Well, that's easy. It's when one person there, 20 people, there, many people there, but at least one person there no longer hears my voice. But the other voice speaking."

Ever heard a sermon like that where you heard the other voice speaking? That the word was so relevant, the word was so penetrating that you thought to yourself, "This is from God Almighty"?

Well, I tell my preaching students, I often teach preaching courses at Emory, and I tell them that this is the goal of preaching. The ultimate goal of preaching is for the congregation not to hear your voice, but the other voice speaking.

Now, I'll admit some sermons are better than others, amen, but that's the goal. And so, on this very morning, what I'd like to do is to share with you one of my favorite Psalms, a Psalms that has brought me comfort and joy and strength throughout my life.

I've heard the other voice speaking through this Psalms. And as I read it and share it with you, I hope you hear the other voice speaking as well. It's Psalm 139. I'll be reading portions of that Psalm.

"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. You hit me in behind and before; and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is so high that I cannot even attain it."

"Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You're there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you're there! If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there, Your hand shall lead me. And your right hand shall hold me fast."

"If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night, even the darkness is not dark to You. The night is as bright as the day; for darkness is as light to You. For it was You who for 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 has 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; and I'm still with You."

Will the Lord add His blessing upon this reading of this holy word, help us to hear it, understand it, believe it, and then live in response to it. Let's be an attitude of prayer together.

Lord, I do thank You for this gift of preaching and the gift of proclaiming Your word to these, my friends and your servants. Lord, it's a task I cannot do on my own strength. I need your power to do it. So Lord, speak to me and through me in such a way that all of us do receive a word from You that will make a difference to our lives. It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen.

As I mentioned before, this Psalm is very powerful for me. It has gotten me through very difficult times in my life and sustained me. And one of the messages I receive from this Psalms may be helpful to you today. One of the messages that I hear God say to me today in this Psalms is that God knows my name. God knows your name.

Listen to these verses again. Verses one through four: "Oh 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."

God knows our name. I'll never forget being with Brandy at Phipps Plaza one year during Christmas. Ever shopped at Phipps Plaza? It's where God shops, just so you know. And again, during Christmas time, it is a beautiful, beautiful place to visit and shop.

Well, Brandon and I, this is way before Paul and we were just walking around in a department store when we ran into Cathy. Cathy was this three year old little girl with blonde hair who was screaming at the top of her lungs and crying, "Mommy, mommy," she had lost her mom. It was awful.

And of course, I don't have kids yet. And I'm God's man of power and glory. I can fix this. "What's the matter?" Ahhh! She cried all the louder.

And so, we tried to find the manager. We tried to find somebody, and after about two minutes, what felt like 20 minutes, we all hear from a distance, "Cathy, Cathy, Cathy, Cathy."

You should have seen this little girl's face. Instant bloom. Her mom was calling her name and she began to run to the sound of her name being called. And right there in that department store, I realized the penetrating power of someone who loves you, calling your name.

Of course, there was Mary Magdalene, who understood the power of this. There in the gospels, she went to the tomb of her Lord to pay homage to the body of her Lord, a person who had given her hope, a person who had given her strength, a person who had given her mercy.

And when she went to the tomb, she found that the body was not there. She didn't know what to do. And so, she ran into who she thought was the gardener. It was so dark at dawn. Little did she know that it was Jesus Christ.

And what happened at that moment? Did Jesus performed some great miracle? Did He give some great statement of insight? No. What did Jesus do? "Mary? Mary?"

The sound of your name being called by someone who loves you. I'll tell you folks, there are days when this is a solid rock for me. When I've had a difficult day and I think to myself, "Does anybody understand me? Does anybody know who I really am? Does anybody get me?"

Ever have one of those days? And then I turn to the Psalm and realize, "Oh yes, God knows me. God understands me. God loves me. God gets me." And that's a solid rock for me. That really helps me.

I love the Upper Room devotional. How many of you read the Upper Room? It's a short devotional every day. If you don't have a devotional to read, I highly encourage you to do that.

A short, simple, relevant message. But I'll never forget coming across a devotional in the Upper Room written by Louise Kilpatrick. She described herself as a 30-year-old widow with two kids, ages two and five. And in the devotional she talked about how just deep in grief she was.

She had just lost her husband three months before and she got up one morning with her kids and she was really in a valley and they wanted to go to the playground and she didn't want to go, but she said, "I got to do it for my kids. I've got to get out of bed. I've got to get out of the house."

So she went and as they walked to the playground, she said her five-year-old son grabbed her hand and as they were looking at a tree that was blooming, he said, "Mommy, don't worry. We'll be happy again one day."

And she said, "At that moment, I realized that in my sorrow I had forgotten God. And it took a child to remind me that God never ever abandons us."

And isn't that the message of that great hymn, In the Garden, that many of us love? And He walks with me and He talks with me, and He tells me I am His own. And the joy we share as we tarry there, no one has ever known.

Amazing. Do you feel lonely today? Do you feel like you're not understood? Do you desire love and connection? Church, let Jesus be your friend. He knows you. He created you.

That's what this Psalms shares with me, but there's another message I get from this amazing Psalms. Not only does God know our name, God knows your name, but it also shares with me that God knows our secrets, which isn't always a joy. Amen.

In fact, listen to these verses, and verses seven through 10, it says this, "Where can I go from Your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You're there. If I make my bed in Sheol, You're there."

God knows our secrets. I don't know about you, but when I was growing up, our family had an unwritten code. Everyone had to follow it. And the code was this: whenever somebody really important showed up at the house unexpectedly like someone like Alan, if they knocked on the door, whoever heard the door, whoever heard the doorbell was legally, ethically and morally responsible to scream out, "Fire drill."

And that meant we were supposed to take the newspapers, the magazines, the dirty clothes, the dirty dishes, run to a back closet, shut the junk in there, shut the door, and not even God was allowed to go in. Your laughter tells me y'all have such a room too.

And then we would open the door, get this right, we'd open the door and we'd say, "Oh, surprise. Come and see us as we always are."

And many times we will do that to God. "Yes, I love you, Lord. I mean, Your love for me is beyond my comprehension. What You've done for me on that cross is unbelievable, but please don't come into the backroom of my heart or my sins and my shame and my secrets are. Please don't come in there."

And so, that's what we do. We don't let God in. We don't allow God to relieve us of that burden, but we forget that God says, "I know You've got the room and I know what You have in there, but beyond all that stuff, don't you know that I'm not here to give you more guilt and more shame and more pressure? I'm here to relieve you of that. I'm here to make you whole, to make well again. I want to relieve you of all that burden."

God knows our secrets. I always found the question that God asked of Adam and Genesis after the fall very interesting. I don't know if you've picked up on it, but after the fall when Adam and Eve sin and they discovered their nakedness, scripture records, God saying something very interesting to Adam.

"Adam? Adam?" God says, "where are you now?" Why would God ask a question that God already knew the answer to? Why would a God of supreme knowledge and power and wisdom ask a question He knew the answer to?

I believe it's because of this: because God was saying to Adam, "I don't want to coerce you. I don't want to trap you. I don't want to force you. Adam, I want to be where you are. Adam, I want a relationship with you. Adam, I want to make you whole. I want to heal you. I know all your secrets. I know all your shame. I know all your guilt, and I can set you free."

The Psalm reminds me of that. God knows our name. God knows our secrets, and He can set us free. But there's another thing this Psalm shares with me, and I want to share with you.

The Psalm also shares with me that God, well, He knows your worth. He knows our worth. Listen to these verses. Verses 15 and 16, "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."

I want you to hear something today, church. You're a masterpiece from Almighty God. Each one of you, each one of us. God created you. God loves you. God made you.

And you know what? Sometimes we forget that. We go out into this world, we forget how worthy we are, how special we are, and instead, we listen to all the other voices telling us who we should be and who we are.

There was a man from Kansas City who liked to draw; draw pictures, cartoons. I never had that gift. I wish I had it. But he liked to draw and his dream was to be in a job at a newspaper drawing cartoons.

He applied for all these jobs, and get this, he was rejected 300 times by newspapers. They told him, "You know what? You should probably pick up something else. You're not very good at this. You lack creativity," they said.

Well, he was upset, but he pressed on and it just so happened that he ran into a pastor. Of course, pastors are always the heroes, right? He ran into a pastor who needed someone to help draw cartoons for his church newsletter.

And so, he took the job for nearly nothing, but there was a problem. He had no place to live. He had no place to draw his pictures. And so, the pastor found a garage with a sofa and some chairs, and he took it.

And the story goes, this young kid was lying on the sofa, just bemoaning his life, how sad it was when he saw this mouse run and scurry across the floor. How low was that? Right?

Oh, by the way, that mouse, at that moment, he drew it. It became rather famous. Maybe you've heard of it. Mickey Mouse? His name: Walt Disney. Rejected 300 times. 300 times. And he did not give up because Walt Disney believed in his gifts. He believed he was worthy. He believed he was skilled. He believed he had potential.

What about you? Do you embrace your worth as a child of Almighty God? Do you embrace your possibility? Do you embrace your gifts or do you listen to the critics? Oh, there are a lot of critics out there.

It's easy to be a critic. It's easy to have a blog and criticize and tear down. But you know what? I don't know about you, but I'm sick and tired of critics. We got enough of them. Amen.

We need encouragers. Don't listen to the critics. And what I've discovered is that most people who love to be critics, they are weak and insecure people. And no one ever did anything great in this life by listening to critics.

When I was a kid, my parents subjected me to all kinds of terrible music. I mean, listen to this. They made me and my sisters go to Barry Manilow concerts. I mean, I'm still scarred by that. Barry Manilow, and what else? Oh, we went to Kenny Rogers. That wasn't too bad, the gambler, all that.

But one of the concerts we used to go to, which I kind of liked as a kid, is we used to go to the Omni for the Gaithers. Remember the Gaither? They used to have a New Year's Eve concert at the Omni back in the day, right.

And there was a song they would always sing for the kids, and of course we learned it. And our parents, my twin sister and I had to get up in front of people at dinner parties and sing it. I'm still scarred by that too.

The song was this. Maybe you remember it. I am a promise. I am a possibility. I am a promise with a capital P. I'm a great big bond of love, potentiality. Remember? That I am learning to hear God's voice and I'm trying to make the right choices. I'm a promise to be anything God wants me to be.

I can't believe I remember that. That song has stuck with me because it's the truth. Because God don't make no junk. Now, that's bad grammar, but that's good gospel.

You're fearfully and wonderfully made. Embrace that today. But there's one more message I get from this Psalms that I want to share with you today. It kind of sums up this entire Psalm.

It is this: I know and you should know that you are God's child. Listen to these verses. "For it was You who formed my inward parts. You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise You for I'm fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are Your works that I know very well. I come to the end, and I'm still with You."

You're a child of Almighty God. We need to claim that because it's something else we often forget. That's why we need to come to worship as often as possible to remind ourselves that we are children of Almighty God.

We are not what the world says we are. We are God's people. We are God's children. We are loved by Almighty God.

My son, Paul reminds me of this all the time. In fact, just recently he reminded me of it again. I have to admit, it was a rough day. I was a little irritable. I know you're shocked. I get irritable sometimes, but I was.

And I was driving Paul around. He was in the car seat and I had to get him out to go somewhere. And I was on the phone and you know the situation, parents. I'm trying to listen to somebody on the phone and Paul's going, "Daddy, daddy, daddy, daddy, daddy, daddy, daddy."

"Hold on."

"What Paul?"

He looks at me and goes, "I love you."

"I've got to go."

Oh, he reminds me that, "... a little child shall lead them." And at that moment, Paul reminded me again of the most important job I have of a father.

My job and Brandy's job is to make sure that kid knows how loved he is. That's 95% of it, because it's only when we experience love that we can express love.

Can you imagine this world if more children knew they were loved? Could you imagine the difference this, that would make in this world? They would grow up to be loving people.

You're a child of God. And honestly, when it comes down to it, that's our role as pastors quite often is just to remind you that you're a child of God and you are loved by God. And if that's the only thing you get from this message, that's more than enough.

Karl Barth was an amazing theologian, probably the greatest theologian of the last 200 years. His last name is spelled B-A-R-T-H, but it's pronounced Bart. You can tell your friends that, who mispronounce it, so you can look all high and mighty. Karl Barth, right?

But again, his influence on the church, it can't be overstated, as a theologian the last 200 years. And he gave his last lecture at the University of Chicago. He was old and feeble, of course. He barely got through it, but he did.

And at the end of the lecture, the hosts knew that he couldn't go much further. There was a Q&A that was supposed to happen, but he couldn't do it. And so, the host took the mic and said, "Listen, Dr. Barth, we thank you for coming. It was remarkable. And we're not going to flood you with a bunch of questions, but we do have just one question that represents all the students. Here's the question: can you sum up for us the meaning of the Christian faith? Just sum it up for us. And all your knowledge of theology, all your knowledge of the church, all your knowledge of the Bible, sum up to Christian faith."

And Barth looked at them with a little grin and said, "Jesus loves me. This I know for the Bible tells me so."

He does, you know? He loves you. Oh, how He loves you, each and every one of you. He knows your name, He knows your secrets. He knows your worth. You're His child.

So, rise up out of this place today and walk into that sunshine knowing that in your heart. It'll make a difference. I promise you that.

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Let's pray. Eternal God, oh, draw us back closer to You and Your love. Remind us of our worth in You. Remind us that we are Your children. It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen.