

Psalm 139 1-18

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 hem 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 attain it.

Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are 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 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.

Matthew 5: 13-16

‘You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

‘You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

Take Your Life and Live It Rev. Charles Schuster September 9, 2007

I don't know why it is. People have been on vacation. They're back from vacation. They're here at church, and they're grumpy. They're out of sorts. They come back with an attitude that it isn't good. And I'd say, Take it out on the Lutherans. Take it out on the Baptists, or the Presbyterians, but don't take it out on the church staff – except some of the grumpiest people are the paid staff. We still have the battle over which clergy person has the biggest diploma. It doesn't end. Thursday I'm blowing up one of these balloons, you know? And I blew and blew and blew, and I blew it up, and I got jumped on by a member of the staff, who came running into my office and said, “That isn't funny.” I think they thought a gun had gone off in my office or something. They must have thought I was close to that or something, and I said, “I know it isn't funny – my lips are bleeding.” I think it all started with the church basketball tournament, I think that's where it began. I think there was a lot of trash talking going on among church members and one of the members of the church, who is an usher, and here today, drove the baseline, but we had to knock him down. Or maybe it's the hot summer, or the heat is getting to us, and I want to say to everybody, “Just go back on vacation, you didn't have enough.” Kids are screaming down at the end of the hall in the preschool. Wires are burning in the second floor.

It kind of makes you think of Walt Garrison. Walt Garrison, this is the first Sunday of the NFL, I guess there was a game Thursday night. I guess there was a game here yesterday, wasn't there. Your day will come. Walt Garrison was a rookie running back that year with the Dallas Cowboys and they were playing the first game of their season. The Chicago Bears, and some of you know the Chicago Bears had Dick Butkus who was a linebacker and mean, would have been a good Methodist – no, not really – would have been a good bishop, yes – Garrison runs through the line and Butkus decks him, looks over his broken body and says, “You come through here again and I'm going to bite your head off.” Garrison stands up and gets mouth to mouth with Butkus and says, “If you did, that would be the first time in your life you ever had a brain in your head.”

It's Rally Day and we're back, and we're a little irritable, some of us, but we're back. It's homecoming, and we've all got these classes, we've got to put them in some room somewhere, and the income's a little thin and the expenses are up and my shoulder hurts. And I may bite your

head off unless I remember something Thornton Wilder put in his play *Our Town*. He said all the greatest people in the world have been trying to tell us this for five thousand years. Sometimes we remember it, sometimes we forget it. On this Rally Day we're going to get it pointed out to us. There's something down deep that's eternal in every human being. Will Durant, in that profound summary of his work on the history of civilization in a book entitled *Heroes* he writes, "Let us sit down and tell brave stories of noble women and great men." Jesus said it a little differently. He said, "You are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world."

This morning I want to have us sit down because I want to tell you some stories about some noble and great men and women right here in this church, because if you look, you'll see them, heroic people who have learned to take their life and live it. Heroic people, right here. People who were launched from someplace and have gone somewhere. Paul Harvey said it, so it must be true. Two state police officers chased a speeder, caught up with him in Waxahatchie, Texas. The cop making out the ticket whispered to the other office, "How do you spell Waxahatchie?" The second officer said that he wasn't sure. The first officer said, "Well, let's let him go and catch him when he goes down the road into Waco." Some people in our church have come from noplaces, like Waco or Waxahatchie, and they got somewhere because they knew that they are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Their background was their launching pad. It can be a problem to come from nowhere, like little towns where we all come from, lots of us. The prophet Amos was quick to say, "What do you expect of me? I'm just a tree trimmer."

A young man trained in a trade, from a small inconsequential town – who would imagine that that person would arise to become the savior of the world? That person, Jesus, who heard them say, and probably thought himself, can anything good come out of Nazareth? The young woman Mary, with an inauspicious heritage, born to a poor family, was called upon by God to do a wonderful thing, and responds, "My soul magnifies God, so tenderly God has looked upon this servant, humble as she is." It's all part of what holds us down, if we don't think that our background is good enough. Can anything good come out of Wellington? Can anything good come out of Wellington, Colorado? An all American football player came out of Wellington, scored 34 points all by himself one game in college. A basketball player on a team that went to the big tournament in New York, drafted by the Pittsburgh Pirate baseball team, played in the National Football League, never met Butkus on the field, fortunately. Led the NFL in rushing his first season, while at the same time he was number one student at Yale Law School, Rhodes scholar, not known so much as an athlete, not known so much as a scholar, just known as Whizzer, Whizzer White, known as a Supreme Court justice. Can anything good come out of Wellington? Whizzer White came out of Wellington. He's not here today, he died.

But if you look around you see Andy Mair. Andy Mair. Can anything good come out of Wellington? Andy won a lot awards. He has letters from presidents, I've seen the letters, letters from Republican presidents and letters from Democratic presidents. Letters from Kennedy and Ford and Reagan and George Bush, both of them, and Eisenhower and Nixon. Presidents sent him personal letters of appreciation for his work. He helped build the embassy in Afghanistan. He met a lot of important people in his time. He met the Pope in the Vatican. He met the president of Israel. Took Jackie Kennedy for her private audience with the Pope. When it was over, she was with Andy, and Andy said, "Well, what did you think? How do you feel?" and she said, "Could I have a cigarette?" He was granted an honorary doctoral degree from Iowa

Wesleyan College. He's been in the White House, he's been in the homes of many world leaders. He says it makes him proud to think what he's been able to do, but he's humble about it. He says he just was at the right place at the right time. He told me this week that he's been nominated for a huge award, but he said not to mention the award because it might jinx him, and he said he might need that award to advance his career at age 94. Andy Mair is most pleased. Of the two awards that he got, he was given the keys to the city of Wellington and he was awarded honorary mayor. Can any good come out of Wellington? Andy Mair thinks it was a good place to grow up. It was where he was launched, it was the background that propelled him and didn't hold him back.

There must be good things that come out of Wellington because our church is trying to build a church, to start a church in Wellington. Some of us have come to realize that there are good things that come out of Wellington. Some of us have gone back home this summer, back to the place where we were launched, and we discovered again, it doesn't matter what our background, it matters our forward progress. It doesn't matter where we came from, it matters where we're going. You look around at the heroes today from place you never heard of, little towns, and some of them don't even exist now. Where we were launched, where we learned who we are, where we first saw the light we have become, where we first discovered that we were the salt of the earth and now we strive to prevent it from losing its flavor. Launched from nowhere, going somewhere, becoming somebody. There are heroes all around us, if we look.

Second thing: There are people who have coped with something bad to make it something good. I have to say that the Senior Council worked very hard to get this second van ready so you could see it today. They coped with something bad to make it good, and you'll want to see it. It's just out the doors there, just turn right after you go out of the sanctuary. You'll want to see it. It reminds me of the story of the bus that was crowded with people, and one person was pushing to get on the bus, and shoving people around, and finally somebody said, "Wait, this bus is full – who do you think you are?" and the person said, "I'm the driver." Fortunately we've got a lot of drivers for our van. They're heroes who have learned to cope, heroes who are drivers, who are driven. William James said "The greatest revolution in our generation is the discovery that human beings, by changing the inner attitudes of their minds can change the outer aspect of their lives." And that's right.

Troy Tulowitzki plays shortstop for the Colorado Rockies. When he was in high school, his high school English teacher had them all write an essay on what they wanted to be when they grew up. Tulowitzki wrote in his essay that he wanted to be a professional athlete. Actually he said a football player. His teacher put a letter grade on it, and then also wrote, "Maybe you ought to have some realistic goals." When they were playing in San Francisco this year that teacher showed up, and he had a copy of the paper and the comments that he had made with the letter grade and he said to Troy, "Would you sign this?" And it wasn't because he wanted an autograph, it was because he wanted his signature on that paper so he would remember never to squelch another young person's dream.

We're the salt of the earth, we're the light of the world, we cope, we overcome. You look around, you see it – heroes here. Let me tell you about Ruth Reed. She's learned to cope. It was in the Thirties. The hot wind was blowing, it was blowing hard. The crops were drying in the

fields. The dust was rising. Day was turning to midnight, dark. Her father was a teacher, didn't make much money. Banks were holding notes of debt that couldn't be paid. Farms were taken by lenders and people were out of luck and out of time, and families would risk just on one last crop. And if that crop failed, which it did, there was no fallback position. They called it the Great Depression. It was a time like we had not seen before and hope we never see again. Some of you have seen it. The Great Depression in so many ways – in the pocketbook and in the mind, depression. Ruth Reed was one of ten siblings. They had to cope. All their dreams were terminated. It wasn't a time when you could follow your dream and expect to get somewhere. One of her brothers entered a contest sponsored by a local newspaper. The contest was, how are people able to cope? I suppose any time you enter a contest, you might win. You probably don't think that it's possible in a time when there's no money, but you might win. Bad luck usually brings more bad luck, and lots of people probably didn't enter the contest because they thought this is not a time you win. Losing seems to bring about more losing. It's like salt that's lost its flavor, or light that's been put under a basket. But bad luck can turn if you cope. Bad luck turned. Her brother submitted this essay, and he won. He won three thousand dollars, and that was big money then. And then her brother did an amazing thing. He distributed his winnings through his siblings, and Ruth got her share, and she took it and went to nursing school. She's the only one of that family of ten siblings that got a college education. Ruth Reed went to nursing school. She graduated. That three thousand dollars distributed sent our Ruth Reed to school, and she was a nurse. Good luck, if we cope.

Bad luck can turn to good, but good luck can turn bad, and it did, for that family. One of their other children, twelve years old, a brother, fell off a railroad trestle. It was terrible, a broken arm, badly broken, shattered. Infection set in. The doctors though, we'll have to amputate. The decision had been made to amputate, and they would have, but Ruth wouldn't let them. Ruth with her nursing degree learned a new technique. I won't go into the details right now, because if I do, some of you won't be able to eat anything else the rest of the day. But let me just say that the new technique involved maggots, okay? But it worked, the arm was saved. The brother lived. Ruth Reed turned ninety. They had a party for her. I announced it last week in the 10:45 service. I said she was ninety-two. She and I had a talk about that. If we cope, our bad luck does not have to be the last word. If we cope, the worst thing that happens to us will not necessarily be the thing we most remember. Exodus has the promised land, sometimes crucifixions, you do see an empty tomb. Dark nights do have sunrises. If we cope we have a chance to overcome, because there's the eternal in every one of us.

Wayne Dyer's right to say "It's never crowded along the extra mile." Because the extra mile is where you'll find people who are the salt of the earth, carrying the light of the world. Isn't the essence of the Christian faith this? Isn't it about hope? Isn't it about finding passion and going with it until your passion becomes your life? Isn't it why Jesus can say those things that don't make any sense? Happy are those who mourn. Happy are those who do what's right. Coping with bad luck to make it good. There are heroes here who do that, among us, people who have learned to cope and to hope, but you've got to look around. Heroes are people who use their background as a launching pad to their future. Heroes are people who cope with bad luck and make it good. Finally, heroes are people who deal with how they're made. They deal with what thing they've been given from birth, and what thing that happens to them physically. The

psalmist declared it: "I praise you, God. I praise you because of the wonderful way you have created me, I was wonderfully made."

I know a girl who sees so much, but she was born blind. She's in our church. I really didn't know Brooke Jostad when I first came, four and a half years ago, but I knew about her. I didn't know her, but I heard about her. She's in high school now. Four and a half years ago I learned about her. I came to one of those noon Lenten services before I was officially on the staff of the church, and her father John gave the sermon in the chapel. There weren't very many of us in the chapel. It was during Lent, it was I think the second or maybe third of those. It was the first event I had attended at the church, and I want to tell you, it was inspiring. John talked about Brooke, spoke about the day she was born when the doctor came in and said she'll never see. Thought about all the beautiful sights she would miss. But there was something unusual about the way he was talking about that. It was not that he was asking for sympathy from us, that was not his attitude. His attitude was upbeat. Others were feeling as I was, I mean you just wanted to weep for that child, but John was talking about what a wonderful life she had, and how she had dealt with her inability to see, and he talked about how much she helped the family see. And we left that chapel that day inspired by the story about Brooke. I wanted to meet her, and in time I had the opportunity to get to know a little more about her. I read once in the local newspaper about how she was out there raising money for the homeless shelter, to buy a refrigerator or washer or dryer or something. In the article they mentioned the fact that she was blind, and she didn't understand why they put that in the article. She didn't see the relevancy between her inability to see and her work to try to do something to help people who didn't have a place to go, to call their home. Her attitude is, she just deals with what life gave her. She told me this week, "People may say that I'm an example of someone who's taken life for what it is and lived it, but everyone has." We all have challenges, weaknesses, insecurities, even if some of them are more obscured. I've always believed that it's not about the challenges we face physically, it's what we do with them. We're beautifully made. The words to her favorite song: "It will never be enough to see what you have to give." Never be enough to see what you have to give. It's about what you have to give. "It's about what I do," she said. "It's about what Jesus sees in me, not what other people think," she said. Her attitude is clear. She sees with her heart. We've watched her grow up in the past four years. We've seen her in worship services. She's read the scripture, she's led us in some of the prayers. We've heard her play the piano, some of us have. We've seen her deal with the given.

Deal with the given you've got. Use what you have and don't worry what you lack There are people here, wonderfully made. If you look around you see them, and they are taking what they've been given and they're dealing with it. Chemotherapy's just an inconvenience. Brain tumor, heart attack, stroke, born blind, early onset Alzheimer's. One woman who has macular degeneration, one of the Christmases I was here wrote me a letter and said, "You cannot believe how spectacular the colors are in the sanctuary with the lights. I can't see very well, but it's like a kaleidoscope and it's beautiful. Heroes all around us, and we're all back for Rally Day. People who are from nowhere, who have used their background as a launching pad. Heroes, people who have learned to cope with some bad luck and make it good. Heroes, people who have seen what life has given them and have come to deal with it in such a way that it has formed their character. It's who they are. Something eternal in us, the light shines, we don't hide it under a basket. We're the salt of the earth. We're wonderfully made, everywhere you look. Everywhere you

turn, here. That's why this church is so wonderful, it's the people. They're heroes, every one a hero. There's something we'll want to remember, the next time we get annoyed, the next time we become irritated. If we bite the head off of one of our members, we're going to get a mouthful of hero. If we bite the head off of one of our members, we're going to get a mouthful of hero. And when you bite the head off of one of our heroes, you're going to get a mouthful of salt. They're the salt of the earth. And we don't want to do that, because too much salt is bad for your blood pressure.