PC2-2 Credo Reflection

**Psalm 139**

1O Lord, you have searched me and known me.  
2You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
    you discern my thoughts from far away.  
3You search out my path and my lying down,  
    and are acquainted with all my ways.  
4Even before a word is on my tongue,  
    O Lord, you know it completely.  
5You hem me in, behind and before,  
    and lay your hand upon me.  
6Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
    it is so high that I cannot attain it.

7Where can I go from your spirit?  
    Or where can I flee from your presence?  
8If I ascend to heaven, you are there;  
    if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.  
9If I take the wings of the morning  
    and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,  
10even there your hand shall lead me,  
    and your right hand shall hold me fast.  
11If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me,  
    and the light around me become night,”  
12even the darkness is not dark to you;  
    the night is as bright as the day,  
    for darkness is as light to you.

13For it was you who formed my inward parts;  
    you knit me together in my mother’s womb.  
14I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.  
    Wonderful are your works;  
that I know very well.  
15    My frame was not hidden from you,  
when I was being made in secret,  
    intricately woven in the depths of the earth.  
16Your 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.  
17How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!  
    How vast is the sum of them!  
18I try to count them—they are more than the sand;  
    I come to the end—I am still with you.

19O that you would kill the wicked, O God,  
    and that the bloodthirsty would depart from me—  
20those who speak of you maliciously,  
    and lift themselves up against you for evil!   
21Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord?  
    And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?  
22I hate them with perfect hatred;  
    I count them my enemies.  
23Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
    test me and know my thoughts.  
24See if there is any wicked way in me,  
    and lead me in the way everlasting.

Will you pray with me?

You assured us that what you made was good. And yet too often we compare ourselves to others, especially when it comes to our bodies, and diminish your creation. We come from and return to you. And yet too often we forget to whom we belong. You created us in your image, made visible through your son Jesus. And yet too often we separate the divine from the human. Forgive us for not trusting what you have created, O Lord. Then quiet us so that we may be present to you. And now, let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer. Amen

**Embody Me 2**

What does it mean to be searched and known by God in this decade of your life? We have reached ages when our reflexes slow and our bodies, once a second thought, now demand attention and even seem to betray us at times; when joints begin to creak and stiffen with *sitting down and rising up.* And when our minds aren’t quite as elastic as they once were, perhaps not recalling a word as quickly as we once did.

*You search out my path and my lying down; you are acquainted with all of my ways.*

Six decades of life experiences melt us, mold us, fill us and, yes, use us…up. How did you arrive at Credo: as a friend to yourself, calm and feeling balanced, or wondering how much longer you can manage a sense of internal agitation?

Psalm 139 makes me think of a quote from Parker Palmer: “Who were you before the world made you change?” To borrow language from the world of Enneagram, we humans are born just the way God intended us to be but then we “fall asleep” to ourselves, creating patterns to fit in to the culture, the family, and the society into which we are born. As we grow and establish ourselves, we lose sight of our essence; we develop survival mechanisms to protect our vulnerability. But patterns formed in childhood may no longer serve us well in adulthood. What coping mechanisms have you carried forward from your family of origin, or early adulthood, that might not be working for you now? This psalm assures us that we need not hide that which continues to haunt us:

*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.*

Psalm 139 also makes me think of the hymn, Simple Gifts:

Tis a gift to be simple, 'tis a gift to be free  
'Tis a gift to come down where I ought to be  
And when I am in the place just right  
I will be in the valley of love and delight  
When true simplicity is gained  
To bow and to bend I will not be ashamed  
To turn, to turn will be my delight  
'Til by turning, turning, I come 'round right.

Sometimes I imagine God patiently waiting, across our entire life spans, for us to “turn ‘round right” – to rediscover our essence, our true self; the truth – God’s truth – about ourselves.

My passion now is to raise awareness about how childhood adversity – both traumatic events and growing up with toxic levels of stress – impact our health and well-being across the lifespan. Because of how rapidly our brain and body develop in childhood chronic, overwhelming stress actually gets under our skin, guiding how our brains wire, how our hormones and immune systems respond to stress, and even how our genes express themselves. Meanwhile positive life events – like growing up in a loving family, living in safe space and getting good at something can counteract the effects of chronic stress. All this to say – *our lived experience becomes our biology.*  And our lived experiences continue to shape our biology until the day we die. Our bodies “keep the score” – even of experiences that we don’t remember. Theologically I hear this echoed in Viktor Frankl’s reflections after living as a psychiatrist in a concentration camp. “We needed to stop asking about the meaning of life,” he wrote, “and instead to think of ourselves as those who were being questioned by life.”

What questions, based on your lived experience, is your life asking you in this season? Can you shift from asking yourself, “What’s wrong with me?” to “What happened to me?”

*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.*

I’ll share with you an insight I’ve gained from viewing this trauma work through a theological lens: I believe Jesus came in a body for a reason – to teach us to listen to our bodies. Harsh life events, whether you want to label them as traumatic are not, tend to numb us and disconnect us from our bodies – because the way we are wired, we can’t push away bad feelings without also pushing away good ones. Our society categorically fears emotional pain – we do whatever we can to avoid or deny it. But Jesus showed us how to feel emotional pain, right? The way back – the way to healing, to breaking through the hard, protective crust we’ve formed so we can rediscover who God created us to be – is by listening to our bodies. And we can do that in three ways: by observing our thoughts, by letting ourselves feel what we need to feel, and by listening to our intuition – our “gut” knowledge. Jesus came to show us what it means to be human and divine. In a body! We too are human – with the spark of divine. In bodies. Richard Rohr, referring to the book of Genesis, calls us and all of nature God’s first incarnation – we are sacred, and when we were formed, we were called good. Let that sink in – everything material that you see is the incarnation of God, Christ in the world. I invite you to take a moment to look around this room at this beloved Credo community and see each other as incarnation.

Let this week be a time for you to embrace who God has created, and is creating, you to be, across your life, and to give yourself permission to fully own it. Let yourself name and affirm your life’s experiences – good and bad – so that you can feel what you need to feel, answer the questions your life is asking you, and claim your wonderful, fearful self. God already claims this about you! You will never be doing this work alone.

*Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.*

Amen