

18th January, 2015.

Psalm 139

Sermon

I mentioned in the sermon last week about the terror attacks in Paris. This week, the reign of terror continues. It appears that in Belgium wherever the Jewish community congregates, whether in synagogues or schools, there is now a police or army presence because there is a distinct feeling that their lives are under threat following on from last week's attack on the supermarket. Imagine living like that.

This week we are also hearing that in Belgium a serious terror attack on police officers was averted when sixteen people in an alleged terror gang were arrested, one of them a female as she got off a plane in London and three of them in Greece.

In addition to that, from the USA, we were told that personal details of senior US personnel had been accessed and published on Twitter, with a message to watch their backs, that the terror gangs were coming to get them. These are human beings who are threatening the lives of other human beings. This is how human beings treat their own.

From that last example, there is a very definite feeling though, that Big Brother is watching our

every move. That harks back to during the Second World War when everyone had to be careful about what they said because walls had ears. Nowadays, walls don't need ears.

We post everything nowadays for the world to see. We put all sorts of personal information on Facebook and Twitter and other social media sites with no thought to the potential consequences.

Equally, we store all sorts of sensitive information from every area of life on computers which can be accessed by those in the know, the hackers, who sell our personal information to unscrupulous individuals or use it themselves in ways that we couldn't even begin to imagine.

Our every move is being watched. We buy on Amazon and Amazon suggests other books we might like. We show an interest in something online and we are bombarded with adverts for weeks to come because our information has been stored and used. We buy things in Tesco and use our Tesco card and before we know it we are being offered special offers on the specific things we buy.

It seems that every move we make is recorded and used, from what we buy to the most sensitive information available. Big brother is not listening. He is well and truly watching our every move from the

comfort of his own home or office sometimes thousands of miles away and in some instances, as we have seen, that results in terror.

In Psalm 139, the Psalmist is aware of being watched, of having his every move watched but the feeling he is left with is not one of terror but of reassurance.

God, he says, knows when he sits and when he stands. God knows his thoughts. He says to God, **you are familiar with all my ways**. God knows what the Psalmist is going to say before he says it. **Before a word is on my tongue, Lord, you know it completely.**

The Psalmist stands in wonder as he voices those thoughts. **Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain** but those thoughts are so precious to him. It's God's knowledge of him which reassures him and provides him with a sense of security and of protection.

That's quite different from the feelings we have when we know that other people have too much knowledge about us. That leaves us feeling insecure and vulnerable and does the complete opposite of providing us with reassurance.

For many, when the wrong information, personal information, gets into the wrong hands, it creates a

feeling of fear and anxiety and even of terror, because people have no way of knowing what others will do with that information. They fear for their businesses, for themselves and for their families.

The overriding awareness which the Psalmist has in this Psalm is of the presence of God. **If I go up to the heavens, you are there. If I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.**

And later he says, **when I awake, I am still with you.** What that reminds us of is the fact that there is nowhere that God is not. Even although we speak about God being with us, we still often use language which refers to God as being 'up there' while we are 'down here' and that is not the case. He is up there, down here, in the east and the west, the north and south and everywhere in between.

Last week when we considered the presence of the Holy Spirit, we saw that the Holy Spirit enveloped us and lived within us. What our attention was drawn to was a God-filled environment and again, this week in this Psalm, what we are being reminded of is that we live in a God-filled environment. Wherever the Psalmist is,

there is God also. God was even present when he was knit together in his mother's womb.

That symbolism of knitting gives me a sense of God actually being present in the womb as a child is formed. It's an amazing thought. God inhabits the whole realm of nature, which includes the heavens and the earth and our innermost being. There is nowhere that we can go or be where God will not be.

How does that leave us feeling? It reassured the Psalmist, as I said, but does it reassure us or are there things that we do that we would prefer God not to see? Are there places that we go that we would prefer God not to be? Are there things we say that we would prefer God not to hear and not to know?

Do we have an awareness of God being present in every situation or an understanding of God being present in every situation? Have we grasped that knowledge which the Psalmist had? Does it amaze us as it amazed him or does it fill us with fear because we fear being judged or punished or worse by God? Has God become almost like the hackers for us, prying where we do not want Him to pry, and do we, as a result, live in fear of Him using the information against us that He has acquired?

If we are filled with fear then maybe we need to examine our lives, our actions, our words, our thoughts but more than that, maybe we look more closely at the character of God as we are able to understand it.

You see, I get no sense in this Psalm of the Psalmist being afraid of the presence of God. I get no sense of his wishing that God were elsewhere or that God knew less, and that reassures me that we need never be afraid of the presence of God. The Psalmist wasn't perfect and yet he is not afraid of God. None of us is perfect but still we have nothing to fear of our God.

In the New Testament, when the Teachers of the Law and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery before Jesus, a woman whom they were ready to stone, all Jesus showed her was compassion. Jesus said, **Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her**, and they all walked away. To the woman he said: **Go now and leave your life of sin**. Jesus didn't condemn her. He reached out to her.

When Jesus called Zacchaeus down from the tree and said he was going to go back to his house, the people muttered about Him being the guest of a sinner. This tax collector had stolen from the

people. Zacchaeus's response was: **Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.** Jesus reached out to him and his life was transformed.

Mary Magdalene was another person who was welcomed into Jesus' presence while others shunned her and muttered against Him.

Peter denied Jesus three times but Jesus never abandoned him to his own devices. He called him to serve Him and told him that on him, He would build his Church. Even Judas wasn't condemned by Jesus. He was allowed to be in His presence and sat at the table with Jesus sharing in the Passover meal. In the end, he said to Judas: **What you are about to do, do quickly.** Even those words ring with compassion for the man who was about to betray Jesus.

No amount of information which God has about us should scare us or leave us living in fear of meeting Him face to face. It's because we are not perfect that He came among us as Jesus. It's because we are not perfect that He died on the cross for us. It's because we are not perfect that He rose again and called us to follow Him to everlasting life.

The Psalmist says to God: **See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way**

everlasting.

The Psalmist does not try to hide his faults and his failings from God because he knows that that is not possible but he also knows that despite his faults and his failings, his God loves him and is always present with him. What a reassuring thought. No matter what any of us have done throughout our lives, no matter what we have said in anger or in condemnation, no matter what we have thought, God still loves us and is present with us.

If we remember nothing else in the days to come, let us remember this, that the God who is present with us wherever we are and whatever we are doing, will never use what He knows against us. He loves us and He reaches out to us and his presence envelops us in our God-filled world.