

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay
<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> - Minister: Rev. Joyce Yanishewski
13th Sunday after Pentecost - September 7, 2025

Call to Worship

Wherever you go, from the top of the highest mountain
or into the deep abysses of the earth, God knows you.

Wherever we go, God knows our name.

Whatever you do, from the time you wake up until you lay your head down again,
God knows you.

Whatever we do, God knows our name.

However you live, from your inner thoughts to your public acts
and everything in between, God knows you.

However we live, God knows our name.

We gather to worship God, who loves us, knows us, and calls us by name.

We gather to worship God,

for we are fearfully and wonderfully made by God who knows our name!

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, March 2025.

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

God of all creation,
you have formed the world in beauty
and filled it with creatures of your love and purpose.

Each one declares your praise –
the mountain states your majesty;
the ripened field, your generosity.

Birds flying aloft sing of your freedom;
the tiny ant works with your persistence.

And what do we declare about you in our lives?

We pray that our work will honour your justice and mercy;
may our relationships speak of your love and compassion.

So may we praise you, O God, not just in this hour of worship,
but in all our waking and our working.

Challenge us today to live out the praise we offer you
through the grace of Jesus Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

**God of justice and mercy,
we offer you our love and loyalty in worship
yet we admit we do not live out that love and loyalty.**

**We don't always act on our good intentions,
we fail to keep our promises, we hurt each other,
and then refuse to seek or offer forgiveness.**

People must look at us and wonder if this is what it means to follow Jesus.

**Forgive us, we pray, and help us to do better,
for we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.**

Assurance of Forgiveness

For nothing is impossible with God.
There is no place you can go,
no end of the earth you can run,
where God cannot find you.
There is nothing on earth or beyond death
that can separate you from the love of God
in Christ Jesus our Lord.
You are forgiven. You are loved.
You are reconciled to God.
Go and live with the love of God. Amen.

Written by Rev. Mindi and posted on Rev-o-lution, <http://rev-o-lution.org/>. Re-posted on the re:Worship
blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2017/02/prayer-of-confession-loving-others.html>.

Prayer for Understanding

God of truth and wisdom, send us your Holy Spirit as we listen to your Word.
Refresh our understanding and equip us to respond to you in love, for the sake of
Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Reading Psalm 139

¹⁻⁶ GOD, investigate my life;
get all the facts firsthand.
I'm an open book to you;
even from a distance, you know what I'm thinking.
You know when I leave and when I get back;
I'm never out of your sight.
You know everything I'm going to say
before I start the first sentence.
I look behind me and you're there,
then up ahead and you're there, too—
your reassuring presence, coming and going.
This is too much, too wonderful—
I can't take it all in!

⁷⁻¹² Is there anyplace I can go to avoid your Spirit?
to be out of your sight?
If I climb to the sky, you're there!
If I go underground, you're there!
If I flew on morning's wings
to the far western horizon,
You'd find me in a minute—
you're already there waiting!

Then I said to myself, "Oh, he even sees me in the dark!
 At night I'm immersed in the light!"
 It's a fact: darkness isn't dark to you;
 night and day, darkness and light, they're all the same to you.

¹³⁻¹⁶ Oh yes, you shaped me first inside, then out;
 you formed me in my mother's womb.
 I thank you, High God—you're breathtaking!
 Body and soul, I am marvelously made!
 I worship in adoration—what a creation!
 You know me inside and out,
 you know every bone in my body;
 You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit,
 how I was sculpted from nothing into something.
 Like an open book, you watched me grow from conception to birth;
 all the stages of my life were spread out before you,
 The days of my life all prepared
 before I'd even lived one day.

¹⁷⁻²² Your thoughts—how rare, how beautiful!
 God, I'll never comprehend them!
 I couldn't even begin to count them—
 any more than I could count the sand of the sea.
 Oh, let me rise in the morning and live always with you!
 And please, God, do away with wickedness for good!
 And you murderers—out of here!—
 all the men and women who belittle you, God,
 infatuated with cheap god-imitations.
 See how I hate those who hate you, GOD,
 see how I loathe all this godless arrogance;
 I hate it with pure, unadulterated hatred.
 Your enemies are my enemies!

²³⁻²⁴ Investigate my life, O God,
 find out everything about me;
 Cross-examine and test me,
 get a clear picture of what I'm about;
 See for yourself whether I've done anything wrong—
 then guide me on the road to eternal life.

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Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church. **Thanks be to God.**

Message Psalm 139 Where Can I Go

In the movie *The Firm* the story centres around a freshly minted lawyer, played by Tom Cruise, who appears to have landed a plum job with a prestigious law firm only to eventually discover that the firm was involved in organized crime and as a result kept a close eye on its every lawyer. The house they had provided to this man and his wife turned out to be full of hidden microphones recording their every conversation, every TV show they watched, their lovemaking. Everything. Creepy.¹

Something that many people fear is that people are watching or listening to us all the time. Just the other day my phone spoke to me when I wasn't speaking to it. It happens more regularly than I wish it to. Sometimes it will say, "Sorry, I didn't quite catch that." And I am like; "I wasn't talking to you!"

I can go from searching for something, say a product on my phone, and everything I go to after that, whether my phone or my computer, starts showing me advertising for that product or information. Most of the time I just move on, but when I start to think about it, it is a little creepy. Not sure anyone would be enlightened by anything I have to say or share, but still a little unnerving knowing that there is possibility, if people desired, that they could know more about my life than I want them to.

It is a good thing that the Psalmist who wrote Psalm 139 understands that God, who knows everything about them, loves them deeply, or this depth of knowing would be creepy. However, I would add that knowing that God knows one fully can be a little unnerving as well. If you just looked at verses 7-12 without anything else, it might actually be a little terrifying.

7-12 Is there anyplace I can go to avoid your Spirit?
to be out of your sight?
If I climb to the sky, you're there!
If I go underground, you're there!
If I flew on morning's wings to the far western horizon,
You'd find me in a minute— you're already there waiting!
Then I said to myself, "Oh, he even sees me in the dark!
At night I'm immersed in the light!"
It's a fact: darkness isn't dark to you;
night and day, darkness and light, they're all the same to you.²

Sounds like a stalker. But that is not where the Psalmist starts. These words are surrounded by words that speak about God's love. That desire that we would know that God's got our back, our front, our everything.

¹ [Scott Hoezee Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18 - Center for Excellence in Preaching](#) Accessed September 6, 2025.

² All scriptures taken from [The Message \(MSG\)](#) Copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by [Eugene H. Peterson](#)

I'm an open book to you;
even from a distance, you know what I'm thinking.
You know when I leave and when I get back;
I'm never out of your sight.
You know everything I'm going to say
before I start the first sentence.
I look behind me and you're there,
then up ahead and you're there, too—
your reassuring presence, coming and going.
This is too much, too wonderful—
I can't take it all in!

What is also interesting to me is the context of this Psalm. Why was it written? It starts with the words, "God, investigate my life; get all the facts firsthand." There are also words that seem really harsh near the end of the Psalm.

And please, God, do away with wickedness for good!
And you murderers—out of here!—
all the men and women who belittle you, God,
infatuated with cheap god-imitations.
See how I hate those who hate you, God,
see how I loathe all this godless arrogance;
I hate it with pure, unadulterated hatred.
Your enemies are my enemies!

Some of you may know that I often choose scriptures from what is called the Revised Common Lectionary. It is an agreed upon prescribed set of readings that follow a three-year cycle that many different denominations and churches throughout the world use.

When it comes to this Psalm, the lectionary cuts out this difficult and angry sounding part of the reading. Yet without it we lose the reason for the entirety of the Psalm. Whoever wrote this was feeling the pressure of having to prove themselves right, vindicated, or at least not guilty of something. It is why the Psalm starts out with "God, investigate my life; get all the facts firsthand. I'm an open book to you." and ends with

²³⁻²⁴ Investigate my life, O God,
find out everything about me;
Cross-examine and test me,
get a clear picture of what I'm about;
See for yourself whether I've done anything wrong—

Something has gone terribly wrong and the person expresses their anger and frustration, maybe even lashing out in fear of what the future holds. This is part of what is absolutely wonderful and hopeful about the Psalms, The Psalms share unabashedly the range of human emotions. The Psalms do not sugar coat anything. Who here has not wished

harm or at least that justice rain upon those who are unjust or who have made one feel vulnerable and troubled?

The Psalms give voice to the range of human emotions and experience. They are not tidied up to suit our nuanced ways of communicating. Even though, when I think about it, many times what I read on social media could well use some nuancing, because a lot of that stuff is not tidied up or nuanced either. Rather than running off at the mouth, the Psalms are often the words of a person or the community to God. God who can handle whatever is on our hearts and minds. God who knows us so well that he already knows everything we are going to say before we start the first sentence. Our God is all about relationship, desires to be in relationship, because God loves us. So, with Psalms like this, we know we can go to God with whatever is on our hearts and minds, with whatever is on our tongues to say, because God knows us so intimately, so well, that nothing about us is hidden from God.

So, one might ask, "Where can you go from God?" The answer in the Psalm is nowhere. We cannot go anywhere where God does not go with us. We may not be aware of God's presence but that is on us, not on God. And this isn't creepy, unless you are trying to run away from God. This is about reassuring presence, deep love, and overflowing grace. God knows us intimately and still loves us, forgives us. God desires more than anything that we live in a way that reflect that we are image bearers of God.

And what does it mean to be an image bearer of God? One way to figure that out is to look to the life of Jesus. Who did Jesus spend time with? How did Jesus treat those who were most vulnerable? How did he treat his friends and those who were strangers to him. And if you don't understand then learn about Jesus. Ask questions. If you can't figure out why Jesus reacted to certain people in ways that don't make sense to you, then learn more. Jesus was the image of God come to us in a way that we might be able to at least begin to comprehend God's heart and mind. We will never fully grasp it. Our God cannot be placed in a box. Often, we want to put God in a box for the week and take him out on Sunday morning hoping that will be enough but God cannot be contained. And that is why God is both an amazing presence and something that scares us.

If we let God roam free in our hearts and minds, in our world, what would be turned upside down? We would not have control over our little piece of the world; the Spirit would be turned loose and who knows what would happen?!

It is a little terrifying and exhilarating all at once. But it also means that we have to let God in to our lives in ways that might not be comfortable. However, we may also find ourselves part of an amazing adventure that leads to transformed lives and a transformed world.

All that starts with us and letting God get in, to have God, as the Psalmist writes...

23-24 Investigate my life, O God,
find out everything about me;
Cross-examine and test me,
get a clear picture of what I'm about;
See for yourself whether I've done anything wrong—
then guide me on the road to eternal life.

This is about living with and for God, which also means living with and for others, those sitting here with us, our friends, families, and with our community. It is overwhelming, amazing, and life-giving. We do not do it alone; we do it with God and we can do it with each other. And please remember that eternal life is not something that just comes after death. Eternal life start with now, in this moment.

May the coming days stretch you as you consider God for you, with you and in you, through the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit and the love of Christ and the amazing grace of God.

Prayers of the People

Good and generous God,
In Jesus Christ you came to us, promising us life in abundance.
We give you thanks today for the abundant gifts we receive in him –
assurance of your love day by day;
relief of mercy when we recognize our own failings;
hope when things seem bleak;
energy to make a difference through our work and our witness;
peace that comes when we trust ourselves in you.
These are the gifts that matter, O God,
especially when the future seems uncertain.

And so we pray, fill our lives with what matters, O God.

Fill our lives with you.

Generous God, today we pray for all whose lives seem empty:
for those whose lives are empty of joy
because the going is tough and friends seem far away...
because sorrow surrounds them...
because hearts are filled with anger or disappointment...

Fill our lives with what matters, O God

Fill our lives with you.

Generous God, we remember before you those whose lives are empty of purpose
and those who do not know the respect of their neighbours:
because they are without work...
because they face discrimination in their communities...
because they have made poor choices and cannot find a way forward...

Fill our lives with what matters, O God

Fill our lives with you.

Generous God,

we remember before you those whose lives are empty of peace & hope:

because they struggle with illness or disability...

because they are powerless in the face of violence...

because old animosities rankle & opportunity for reconciliation is elusive...

Fill our lives with what matters, O God

Fill our lives with you.

Good and generous God,

fill us with the energy & compassion of your Spirit

to reach out to those whose lives seem empty.

May we become the gift we have received in Jesus

for it is in his name that we pray, saying....

Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen

Benediction

Wherever you go this week, know this:

God knows you better than you know yourself.

No matter where you go or what you do,

God is already there,

surrounding you with mercy

and guiding you with love.

So go with joy and confidence,

knowing that God goes with you.

[re:Worship: Benediction: Proper 11A](#)