

Sermon for Christ & Grace Church Petersburg, VA
2nd Sunday after Epiphany, Year B, January 14, 2018
The Rev. Bill Queen
“God is Always with Us”
Psalm 139:1-11

I'd like to begin today by reading you a short children's book, *The Runaway Bunny*, by Margaret Wise Brown; that was one of our favorite books that we read to our children when they were little; listen to it here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bsYjlwu7u8k> ; it's such a cute story, don't you agree?; did you know that the Bible has its own version of *The Runaway Bunny*?; it does, and you read part of it this morning in Psalm 139; that Psalm is one of my favorites, as it shows how and why we cannot get away from God -- even if we tried; I am going to read it and include several verses that were not in our selection for today, then reflect on how God promises to be with us always; if you'd like to follow along, you will find the complete Psalm on page 794 of the prayer book

vv 1-3 “LORD, you have searched me out and known me; you know my sitting down and my rising up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You trace my journeys and my resting-places and are acquainted with all my ways. Indeed, there is not a word on my lips, but you, O LORD, know it altogether;” so God not only know what and who we are at every moment of our lives, God has always known us, and known us in a way that all of our being is completely known by God; God knows our actions and movements from the outside; God knows equally our thoughts and emotions from the inside

v 4 “You press upon me behind and before and lay your hand upon me;” so this is how God knows us inside and out, because of God's presence with us; God is actually touching us, all the time, even though we cannot feel that touch

v 5 “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain to it;” so God's presence with us is not only something we cannot physically feel, it is something we almost cannot believe; it is almost too good to be true; but it is true, nonetheless

v 6 “Where can I go then from your Spirit? where can I flee from your presence?” here the Psalmist speculates: is there anywhere that someone, that you or I, could go to get away from God?; the next several verses will answer that

v 7 “If I climb up to heaven, you are there; if I make the grave my bed, you are there also;” in the Hebrew conception of the world, heaven is the highest possible place, and the grave is the lowest possible place; so God has got us covered at every possible vertical level

v 8 “If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;” in the Hebrew conception of the world, “the wings of the morning” is the farthest possible place to the east, and “the uttermost parts of the sea” is the farthest possible place to the west; so God has got us covered at every possible horizontal position

v 9 “Even there your hand will lead me and your right hand hold me fast;” so God is not only present with us, touching us, anywhere we might be; God is, if we are attentive and responsive, leading and guiding us, and also holding onto us to protect us from harm

v 10 “If I say, ‘Surely the darkness will cover me, and the light around me turn to night;’” in the Hebrew conception of the world, death takes one into a shadow world of darkness; and the Psalmist expresses some doubt: perhaps when one, when you or I, dies, we might then find ourselves beyond God’s view, beyond God’s touch, beyond God’s guidance, beyond God’s protection; but the next verse refutes that doubt

v 11 “Darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day; darkness and light to you are both alike;” so what is darkness to us is not darkness to God; God is able to see and to be everywhere, across all space and across all time; what we see here is a prefiguring of what will be developed more fully in later Christian theology, that our relationship with God does not end at death; that while from our perspective, life and death are very different; from God’s perspective life and death are hardly different at all; that’s why Psalm 139 is one of the possible choices for the Burial Office

the one thing that is not stated in the Psalm is the same thing that remains unsaid, but understood, also in *The Runaway Bunny*: that the mother would go to such lengths to keep her little bunny with her, that God goes to such lengths to be with us, is love, pure and simple; thank you, God, for being like the mother who is always there with us and for us; thank you for keeping us always in your loving embrace