



Never Alone

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? 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. – Psalm 139:7-10

You don't have to be all by yourself to feel alone. If you have ever been at a party or some other social event at which you didn't know even one other person, you can feel a little bit alone even when you are surrounded by people. If you have ever had to take an unpopular position because it was the right thing to do, and it seemed as though everyone else was against you, you know what it is to feel alone. Joseph, Elijah, the Apostle Paul, Martin Luther -- all of them knew what it was like to feel alone. Faithful confessors of God's word often feel alone still today.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said, "There is no one who is more alone than a man who is alone with his sin." When we have covered up our sins, when we have tried to carry our guilt by ourselves, that is a lonely and miserable place to be. Hell is going to be a crowded place -- the vast majority of all people who have ever lived are going to wind up there -- but I suspect that for all the souls who will be there, every one of them will feel very much alone in their suffering. Misery may love company, but no one experiencing that misery will be able to enjoy the company of others who share the same fate. Thank God that Jesus endured that loneliness for us when cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" from the cross.

King David had known all these kinds of loneliness throughout his life. He had lived life alone on the run from King Saul, made the lonely stand for what was right when his own men urged him to kill Saul, lived as a lonely stranger in a foreign land among the Philistines, and of course lived long, lonely months with the burden of his guilt for committing adultery with Bathsheba and killing Uriah the Hittite.

But David also came to know that the believer is never truly alone. Even if, in our guilt, we tried to get away from God, like Adam and Eve hiding behind the trees in the garden of Eden, there is no place that we can escape from his presence. He takes us every direction in these words from Psalm 139. From the very edge of the universe above us to the deepest trenches in the bottom of the ocean, from the points of the compass where the sun rises in the east or sets on the far side of the Mediterranean Sea in the west, God is there.



And David had come to appreciate God's promise to be there. Far from a frightening thing, David describes God's promise to be with us as a tender and comforting truth. "Even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast." I can't help but think of Don Matzat's description of the Christian life as being like the relationship between a little boy and his father sitting in the waiting room while the car is being fixed. In order to get his little boy to behave, the father could give him a list of rules to keep, and then scold him when he breaks them. Or he could say to his son, "Sit right next to me here and hold my hand." As long as the little boy is holding his father's hand, he is staying out of trouble. And as long as he is holding his father's hand, he gets to enjoy an intimate relationship with his father. Of course, Christian sanctification is more like the second picture. As long as we stay close to our heavenly Father in faith, he is holding our hand and enabling us to keep out of trouble.

Likewise, in his promise to be with us, there is our heavenly Father, holding our hand and keeping us safe. He isn't somewhere far across the room keeping an eye on us while we fend for ourselves. He has taken a place right beside us, and his right hand, his strong hand, has taken ours in a grip that won't let go. It is that ever-present hand that guides us through trouble picks us up when we are tired, pulls us to safety when we are in danger, and simply assures us that he cares about us and wants to be close to us. As long as God is with us and holding us with his hands, we can be sure that we are safe.

Psalm 139 is an interesting study of God's attributes. It takes the three "omni" words we learned in confirmation class—omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent—and describes them not as abstract theology, but as part of God's warm and living relationship with his people. So it is here with his omnipresence. Sometimes we may feel lonely, even in a crowd, but we are never alone. God is with us, holding us with his hands, and letting us know that we will always be safe with him.

In Christ, Pastor Vieths