

Rev. Seth D Bode + Sermon 227 + Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

"Lord God, You have appointed me as a bishop and pastor in Your Church, but You see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked Your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon Your Word. Use me as Your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all."

"Sir, I would see Jesus."

PRAISE GOD FOR HIS GIFTS

Psalm 139

¹⁴I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

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Here's a daring comparison. Did you know that you have something in common with Evel Knievel? The father of extreme sports was a daring individual named Robert Craig Knievel, better known as Evel Knievel. Fun fact: EK had suffered 433 bone fractures by the end of 1975. I'll let you do the math; adult human bodies have 206 bones. EK lived to be almost 70. He didn't die from a stunt, but rather a liver disease not directly related to his stunts. What a machine our human bodies are! Even more, what a cool God we have! **God gave healing to a man who changed his name to Evel and who risked his life for stunts and crowds.**

Today we come before God to praise him for the fact that we are made fearfully and wonderfully. The words are King David's, but believers have loved them ever since. But why? What's so fearful and wonderful about how God made us?

Well, let's talk facts. Our **skeletal system** is pure art and architecture. The hardest bone in the body is the mandible (jaw bone), capable of 290 lbs. of pressure. It is a wonder from the smallest stirrup bone in the ear to the largest, the femur of the leg; from the most fragile in the toes to the most huddled in one place, the hand. There are just shy of 700 named skeletal **muscles**, with new variations in individual muscle anatomy still being discovered. There are over 37 trillion **blood cells** in your body. There are 100 billion **nerve cells** in the body, which, if stretched individually, would cover 60,000 miles or more than twice around the earth. Here's a fearful fact: The **acid in your stomach** is strong enough to dissolve razorblades. We lose about 70 strands of **hair** each day (also fearful – more so to some than others). There are 32 million **bacteria** on every inch of skin. Now you can confidently say ...

You Know God's Wonderful Works Full Well

Literally, this passage is hard to translate. A better translation would say, "*I praise you that by fearful things I am made wonderful.*" The sense is that there are fearful things in our bodies, blood, tissue, nerves, bones, and so on. Professionals and students in the medical field can tell you how fearful it is to study and work with them. **But take those fearful things together, and we are made wonderful. For that we praise God.**

But is it enough? Have I fit enough about God into our 3-lbs. brains, which are capable of holding between 3 and 1000 terabytes of info, protected by 22 bones, firing with ninety billion neurons, to praise God adequately? Are we alright? Are we in God's graces if we praise Him enough?

One of the most amazing parts of our creation is our conscience, because it tells us what to do and what not to do, what we have done wrong and what we have done right (Rom. 2:15). It even tells us we are accountable to a higher moral power. This is inescapable. In the same psalm, David asked God, “*See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting* (v 24).” We know the Lord is a perfect Judge who allows no sinner, no abuser of the body, no one who fails conscience and commandment, to stand before Him. Through conscience, we can learn sin, and sin explains the problems and diseases of our bodies.

We also know we are not stuck in these bodies forever, but things will change when we are with God. We have evidence that our existence and abilities are no mystery. It isn't just, “Huh, I'm fearfully and wonderfully made. How about that? Go figure.” It's not a selfish, “Mirror, mirror, in the book, check out just how good I look.” Instead, it's glory to God! It's, “*I praise God for His fearful and wonderful creation of ... me!*” It's a reason to take care of God's gifts and a recognition that He takes care of you better than you can imagine.

But there is more to learn. The higher moral power hasn't left us to wonder what He's up to. He instead tells us about Himself and who He is. He has revealed Himself in His Word. He has given us His names of power, *Elohim*, and of free and faithful love, *Yahweh* or Jehovah. He has called Himself holy and high, perfect and pure. He named Himself the great, “I AM,” He is Who He is.

What I am driving at here is that God has taken His time not just to form us out of clay, air, and a rib. If the womb wasn't miraculous enough, God hasn't just created us. He has gone to work for us. He has protected us, provided for us, formed faith in us, and put eternal life in us. Not only that, but when sin entered the world, God gave us a remarkable promise. God has stepped into our world in time to assume one of these incredible human bodies for Himself. His body grew strong and wise. He used His body to praise God with miracles and unconditional love. Then He sacrificed and submitted His body to death. Did you know that's also part of God's wonderful works that you know full well?

Yes, the chief praise in this psalm may seem like it's for us and how wonderfully we're made, but truly the chief praise is for the Father Creator as well as the Son Redeemer and the Holy Spirit Sanctifier.

“*His works are wonderful; I know that full well.*” The words “full well” in Hebrew are really one word, *meod*. *Meod* literally means “muchness.” When the flood came, Genesis says the waters of the rain rose above the mountains, using the word *meod meod* – twice. Our translation says you know God's wonders “full well.” Jesus also says knowledge of God is eternal life, that sinners may know God and Jesus Christ. Faith is a confidence based on knowledge. “Why am I going to SS?” children may ask. So you know God *meod*, full well! “Why would I go to Bible study?” adults may wonder. So you know God *meod*, full well! “Why am I back at church again?” teenagers and twenty-somethings wonder. So you know God *meod*, full well! “Why does pastor have to talk about the Hebrew again?” some might question. So you know God *meod*, full well!

Of course you don't have to know everything about God to be saved. When we're not sure, we are also reminded that His knowledge of us is even greater than ours of Him. God knows us so well even before our birth, as the surrounding verses remind us: “*For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. ... My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be*” (13,15,16).

These are not God in the abstract. This is God in the act. **God is expressive about how much He knows**, and He used King David to show us that. You can't go anywhere without Him. He weaved you together. He planned for your future. He searches you. He finds you.

(Quote Psalm 139:1-12) David could have said omniscient or omnipresent. Instead he says, "God pursues me."

So Christians, know full well that God knows you. Know full well that it's okay to admit you have more to learn. Know full well that it's okay to ask questions of God. Know full well that He knows you personally. He knows your problems, He knows your worries, and He knows your future. He knows more full well than we need to.

I say this because people get lost in sin, and they sinfully attack the human body. They hold God responsible for flaws, ignoring sin. Then they make things that aren't flaws into flaws and assert things like this: "I am not smart enough. I am not tall enough. I am not clever enough. I am not charming enough. I am not thin enough. I am not present enough. I have not accomplished enough. My ears aren't small enough. My skin is not dark enough. My complexion isn't clear enough. My name isn't popular enough."

Don't forget that King David was the runt of his family. Zacchaeus was a shorty. Paul was tongue-tied. In these appearances and *apparent* failures, we praise God. He has made you the way He has intended. He has chosen you out of a world that says you have to be ... smart, tall, clever, thin, attentive, accomplished ... a world that says you have to be enough. Meanwhile, Jesus has been enough. When our bodies couldn't walk on water, Jesus could. When we were trapped by a crowd of our enemies, Jesus walked right through them. When we felt like teaching our parents a lesson or two, Jesus taught Mary and Joseph spiritual lessons. When people cut and mangled and risked God's gift of their own bodies, Jesus did not. When our bodies couldn't stand suffering, He took the oppression and embarrassment – the punishment – of our sins.

You really couldn't be more plain and ordinary than Jesus according to His human nature. But that's just what God intended. Now that brings fear and wonder! Praise Him! He created you. Praise Him! He won you back. Praise Him! He formed faith in you. Praise Him! Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are yours through your baptism. Praise Him! The Last Supper is yours now and often. Praise Him!

Before Evel Knievel said goodbye to the last person who ever interviewed him, he talked about how he found God a few months before, in a hotel room in Daytona Beach. "All my life I was an atheist," he says. "I'd tell people I didn't believe Jesus could walk on water. Then something happened in Daytona. God spoke to me. He said, 'Robert, you got to stop telling people you don't believe in me. I been takin' care of you for years, watchin' over you. I done everything for you. And you go tell people you don't believe in Me. You gotta stop it.'" Evel put his hands over his face, then sobbed, "I told God I'd never insult Him again." **Even someone who knew the wonder and frailty of his human body, who tested and tempted God, could be turned around and praise God.**

For those of us who have lived a quieter life, fewer risks, we have the Word of God more certain. We have the means of grace, the Gospel in Word and sacrament. We praise God, because He has made Himself known. We know that full well.

Amen.