**Sermon: A Song of Wonder**

If you’re involved in education you will not have failed to realise that half-term is different this year. It’s a week later than last year in the city, and not in line with the county; indeed, a number of neighbouring counties are not in line with each other. This has led to split families, with parents who are teachers working the week their own children are off and vice versa, if between them they’re in separate councils.

All a world away from this day last year, when we went down to Plymouth to have a look at the art college there with our daughter, and the reason the family aren’t here today is because Sunderland is another option and they’ve gone up there to have a look at that one.

Common to both and indeed all long journeys is about the only car maintenance I’m capable of - my STOP acronym for making sure I’ve at least done my bit re our vehicle: screenwash, tyres, oil, petrol. The screenwash so we can see where we’re going; the tyres to make sure they’re correctly filled; the oil to lubricate the parts so they run smoothly (I had to look that one up), and the petrol of course to provide the fuel to get to our destination, not to mention the coolant level.

And before we get going on the daily journeys our lives are made up, it’s no bad thing to perform the same checks. We need to be clean so we don’t lose sight of where we’re going; we need to be filled the Spirit of God (the Greek for Spirit, by the way, pneuma, means breath), we need the anointing oil of prayer in order that all the parts of the day are covered, and we need to the fuel of God’s Word, without which we won’t get very far.

This morning we are going to stop and consider God’s wonders, not my own phrase but one that’s to be found in the book of Job, which, as I said a few weeks back, we’ll be looking at next summer.

There are so many it’s hard to know where to begin, so we’ll stick with three from this psalm; three wonders of an ancient God:

His Omniscience

His Omnipresence

His Omnipotence

And I trust as we do so will find great strength and blessing as we continue on our journey. So let’s take the first of those: His Omniscience. We have an all-knowing God, and this can be seen from start of Psalm 139 (vv1-4).

Not only does the Lord know all the intimate details of our own lives, he is fully aware of everything concerning every single person on the planet. That is just incredible. Not only does he know what we do on the outside (when we sit and when we rise); he knows what we’re thinking on the inside (you perceive my thoughts from far). He knows what we’re about to say before we say it (v4), something that would come in handy sometimes before we blurt out our latest inappropriate comment. In short, such knowledge is beyond the psalmist’s comprehension and arguably, in vv5 + 6, this is something he’s not altogether comfortable with.

This could, however, be taken in a different way. Because God knows all these intimate things about us, we don’t in a sense need to worry about what he would do if he found out about something that’s hidden to the rest of us, because he knows it all already, and do you know what, he still loves you.

As it says in the song we sometimes sing with the children:

*Jesus is the best friend I could have,*

*When I’m feeling miserable he makes me glad,*

*Even though he came to earth a long, long time ago,*

*He knows me inside out – and yet he loves me so.*

Nobody knows you like the Lord. For, as the psalmist goes on in later verses:

*Your eyes saw my unformed body;
    all the days ordained for me were written in your book
    before one of them came to be.*

You may have seen the film ‘The Truman Show’, starring Jim Carrey, about a man whose life is being played out before a global audience of millions in a long running soap opera, except he doesn’t realise it at the beginning. When he finally works it out at the end, he has an encounter with the show’s creator, who says

*I am the Creator…in my world you have nothing to fear…I know you better than you know yourself…I have been watching you your whole life…I was watching when you were born…I was watching when you took your first step…when you had your first day at school…talk to me*

So we can take comfort in the knowledge that our God is omniscient, all-knowing, He knew what our sinful hearts would do to our lives, and that’s why he sent Jesus, to offer us a way out from an eternity separated from him. According to Warren Wiersbe in his excellent commentary on the psalms, the verb ‘search’, right there at the beginning of this one, means ‘to examine with pain and care’. He goes on to say that the Jewish people used this word to describe digging deep into a mine, exploring a land and investigating a legal case. In all these areas, particularly the last one, you need a thorough and intimate knowledge of your subject. This is what the Lord has of us. He knows us better than we know ourselves.

And not only does ‘he know our every weakness’, as the old hymn says, he knows all about our other struggles and the things we find difficult. Near the beginning of the book of Revelation are seven letters to the churches, all of which contain the Lord saying ‘I know…’. ‘I know your deeds, your hard work, and your perseverance…I know your afflictions and your poverty…I know where you live.’ There’s absolutely nothing going on in our lives that the Lord doesn’t know about. You don’t have to explain anything to him. Talk to him. Come and talk to Jesus, have a conversation, for we have a God who knows, who cares, and who loves you very much.

He knows everything, and secondly, he is everywhere. For the second wonder of our ancient God is that he is omnipresent.

***7****Where can I go from your Spirit?
    Where can I flee from your presence?****8****If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
    if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.****9****If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
    if I settle on the far side of the sea,****10****even there your hand will guide me,
    your right hand will hold me fast.****11****If I say, ‘Surely the darkness will hide me
    and the light become night around me,’****12****even the darkness will not be dark to you;
    the night will shine like the day,
    for darkness is as light to you.*

There’s nowhere we go that God isn’t, and this is a wonderful thing. Sometimes we talk glibly of a God-forsaken place, but there is no such place. For we have a God who is everywhere, all of the time. We can’t be in two places at once, but God is in all of the places simultaneously.

*And he is with us now every step that we take,*

*With him we are never alone.*

Again as with the omniscience of God, you feel the psalmist is slightly unnerved by the Lord’s omnipresence. It isn’t necessarily the comfort to him that it might be to us. The Scriptures tell us of the futility of trying to hide from God. Running away is not an option, as Adam & Eve, and Jonah found to their cost. You cannot hide *from* God, but I would encourage you to hide *in* Him. Wherever you are, he is there, and always will be. As David wrote in perhaps the most familiar and much-loved psalm of all,

*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,*

*I will fear no evil, for you are with me,*

*Your rod and your staff they comfort me.*

Indeed the whole of Psalm 23 is a reminder that the Lord is always with us, whether we’re in green pastures, by quiet waters, or in the dark valleys. I wonder which one of those landscapes describes your current experience. Is it the green pastures of a pleasing and fruitful life; the quiet waters of an ordinary existence, or the dark valleys of doubt, depression and fear? Whatever place you’re in, the Lord is right there with you.

I love those words in Isaiah 43:

*But now, this is what the Lord says –
    he who created you, Jacob,
    he who formed you, Israel:
‘Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
    I have summoned you by name; you are mine.****2****When you pass through the waters,
    I will be with you;
and when you pass through the rivers,
    they will not sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire,
    you will not be burned;
    the flames will not set you ablaze.****3****For I am the Lord your God,
    the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour;*

Equally comforting are the words of the Lord Jesus to his disciples shortly before he left them behind and went back to heaven:

*‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.* ***19****Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,* ***20****and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’*

It’s good to be reminded of these words, however familiar they may be. We need to know that God is with us, for with us he is.

Our daughter was part of the first ever girl’s football squad to represent Whitehall in a tournament at Judgemeadow recently. I thought she did very well, and her friend called her ‘Amy Vardy’, which I thought was good. But the words of another Amy, Amy Carmichael, are a wonderful reminder of the presence of God in our lives. Amy Carmichael was a missionary in India, opening an orphanage and founding a mission. She worked tirelessly over there for over half a century, and her many quotes speak volumes of the presence of God in her own life. Here’s one of them:

[*Our loving Lord is not just present, but nearer than the thought can imagine - so near that a whisper can reach Him.*](https://www.azquotes.com/quote/1410193)

And here’s another one:

 [*We go into the unknown every day of our lives, and especially every Monday morning, for the week is sure to be a battlefield, outwardly and inwardly in the unseen life of the spirit, which is often by far the sternest battlefield for souls. Either way, the Lord your God goes before you, He shall fight for you!*](https://www.azquotes.com/quote/751396)

Our omnipresent God has been with us, he’s with us, and will continue to be with us; of that there is no doubt. And because he’s always there, we can always talk to him. Of course, we can’t always be in prayer, but I wonder if there’s opportunities that we’re missing sometimes.

Martin Luther, now 501 years on from nailing his theses to the door, said,

*“I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer”*

And so this song of wonder has given us some classic verses containing the omniscience and omnipresence of our ancient God; his all-knowing and ever-present help in times of trouble and happier times, too.

Thirdly and finally our God is omnipotent. He is all-powerful, and that should be a great help to us all. Is anything too hard for the Lord? You can answer if you want to. Nothing is impossible with God, whether it’s the virgin birth or the regeneration of fallen humanity.

As Bruce Milne says in his book, ‘Know the Truth’,

*Here is the heart of God’s lordship and it calls for an attitude of utter confidence in the midst of all the ‘impossibilities of human history and personal circumstances’.*

Here’s another quote from that great author, Source Unknown:

*Nothing is too big for my God to accomplish, and nothing is too little for Him to use in accomplishing it!*

If he can knit us together in our mother’s wombs, he can do seemingly impossible things through us after we’ve been born.

A boy travelling to visit his grandparents sat beside a man who happened to be a Bible college tutor. The boy was reading a Sunday school take-home paper when the tutor thought he would challenge his young companion. "Young man," said the tutor, "If you can tell me something God can do, I’ll give you a big, shiny apple." The boy thought for a moment and then replied, "Mister, if you can tell me something God can't do, I’ll give you a whole barrel of apples!"

You can tell this is quite an old illustration as I’m not sure an apple would be a great incentive nowadays, but in a similar way we’ve been singing a song on Wednesday mornings since what seems like the dawn of time, but it has to be said I never tire of singing it, for it contains a wonderful truth:

*My God is so big, so strong and so mighty, there’s nothing that he cannot do.*

The Ark sings of the omnipotence of God, and I pray that they will know it. It’s a good prayer for each one of us. If you want a script for such a prayer how about Paul’s inspirational words to the Ephesians?

*I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people,* ***19****and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength* ***20****he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms,* ***21****far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.*

My brain, my phone and my laptop all have something in common. I’m sure you could think of a number of facetious answers, but what I had in mind is that all three are only being used to a fraction of their full potential. There is capacity for so much more. What a prayer for others, and indeed for ourselves, that we know this incomparably great power in our own experience. Power over sin, power over the devil, power over temptation, power to confront those situations in our lives, those dark valleys, that would both and confuse us.

We sang a song the other week that we haven’t sung for a while: ‘There is power in the name of Jesus’. How true this is, and how we need to tap into the power at out our disposal if we are God’s people here this morning. And if you’re not sure if you are – and for that matter this is for each one of us, let’s remind ourselves of these three wonders of our ancient God: His omniscience, His omnipresence, and His omnipotence. God knows everything about you – and he loves you. He’s everywhere around you – for he is with you. And he is all-powerful, so wonderful in that he is for you.

What is your response to this? This all-knowing, all-surrounding, all-powerful God. Is it comfort or concern? Do you want to embrace him or escape him? Does his power arouse your worship or give rise to your anxieties?

Before we resume the journey that’s today, let’s take comfort that just as there’s more to a car than the aspects I mentioned at the start, there’s more to our Creator than the attributes we’ve thought about today. We’ve only scratched the surface of three of them. But my prayer is that our omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent God will be both at the heart and the reason for our journey, and that even though we may not understand the mysteries of the deity, we will always keep in mind the marvels of our destination, where wonder upon wonder awaits those who know and love the Lord.