

Psalm 139, the Runaway Bunny and the Johari Window

One of Margaret Wise Brown's best loved children's book, along with the ever popular *Goodnight Moon*, is *The Runaway Bunny*.

Once there was a little bunny who wanted to run away. So he said to his mother, "I am running away." "If you run away," said his mother, "I will run after you. For you are my little bunny." "If you run after me," said the little bunny, "I will become a fish in a trout stream and I will swim away from you." "If you become a fish in a trout stream," said his mother, "I will become a fisherman and I will fish for you."

No matter where the little bunny threatens to go, the mother bunny promises she'll be there to find him. "I will become a bird and fly away," and there he is in the illustration sprouting wings; she counters, "Then I will be a tree that you come home to." His fantasies of flight get even more extreme as do the mother's responses. "I will become a sailboat and sail away from you." The picture is of the bunny's ears becoming huge sails. But mother bunny is right there. "I will become the wind and blow you where I want you to go."

In the end, little bunny realizes there is no shaking mom and he capitulates. "Shucks, I might just as well stay where I am and be your little bunny." And so he did. "Have a carrot," said the mother bunny.

This classic story, written in 1942 has never been out of print. It turns up all the time on reading lists recommended by librarians and child development experts. Why is this? The story contains an exaggerated and fun version of an important message that a small child needs to hear. *Parents can be trusted to keep you safe—even from yourself.* No matter where you are, or how foolish your mistakes are; even if they take you away from home, your parents are there for you. You cannot escape their love. It pursues you wherever you choose to go.

Psalm 139 tells a similar story about God. *Where can I go then from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?* There's nowhere we can go to escape God's presence. Not in heaven, not in hell, not in life, nor in death. If we hide in the darkness God can see right through it. There's nowhere we can go that is outside of God's presence or apart from God's love.

Have you ever tried to run away from God? We may pretend that God is not there or that God doesn't see us. We may be angry and turn away from God. Like the prophet Jonah who booked passage in a ship going in the opposite direction of where God told him to go, we might try to run away from the burden of responsibilities God has given us. There are many ways people run and hide from God. They may try to lose themselves in alcohol or other drugs, to try and escape in oblivion. People try to escape God by putting their faith and hope in other things: money, possessions, pleasure, work, achievements, success, etc. Psalm 139 assures us that it doesn't matter how far away we run, God's love pursues us. We can never get away from God's love.

God’s omnipresence, the belief that God is present everywhere, is the focus of verses 6-11: *Where can I go then from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?* There’s nowhere we can go where God can’t find us. God is not only omnipresent; God is also omniscient, *all knowing*. The first 5 verses of the Psalm are about God’s knowledge.

Lord, you have searched me out and known me; you know my sitting down and my rising up; you discern my thoughts from afar... Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain to it. God not only knows everything we do and say, God also *discerns our thoughts from afar*. God, in fact knows us far better than we know ourselves.

What is it to be known? Let me share a psychological model with you called the *Johari Window*. *Johari* sounds like a fancy name until you realize that this schema was invented by two Psychologists, Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham. The title is just the combination of their first two names: *Joe* and *Harry*.



There are 4 panes in the window. The left column represents things that are *known to self*. The right hand column represents things *not known to self*. The top half represents things *known to others* and the bottom half things that are *unknown to others*. So the first pane, *known to self and known to others* is our *public self*, the face we are comfortable showing to the world. The top-right hand pane are things that others see but we don’t, our *blind spot*. The bottom left pane of things *known to self and not known to others* is our private self, our censored self that we don’t let anyone else see. The bottom right hand pane is *unknown to self and others*, our *unconscious*. Using this model people are encouraged to make the pane of our public self larger through openness and self-disclosure, our blind spot pane smaller through receiving feedback and the unconscious self smaller through self discovery.

God doesn’t just see part of us, God sees our whole selves. God knows us better than we know ourselves. God sees through the parts of ourselves that are hidden from others. He sees through the parts that we ourselves are blind to. God knows our unconscious and often speaks to us through the unconscious in dreams and meditation, as he spoke to Jacob with the dream of a ladder to heaven in our O.T. passage this morning. God doesn’t just know us from a distance, but from within. Of course there are parts of us, especially those hidden parts, that we might wish God didn’t know. But we can’t hide even our thoughts from God. God knows our worst thoughts as well as our best ones. God knows our secret fantasies, and our sullen, silent rants and rages. God knows just how

dissatisfied we are with ourselves and God knows how deeply we have failed to live up to our own and his standards.

And yet God doesn't know us as we know ourselves. God never condemns us. Of course we are sinners, but God sees us not so much as *sinner* but as *forgiven*. As Paul taught the Romans in today's Epistle lesson, God's Spirit enables our Spirits to become God's children by adoption. God knows us not as estranged, but as *beloved*, his own beloved children. God sees us through his eyes of love, not through the eyes of judgment. He not only sees us as we are, but also sees us as he invites us to become. For anyone *in Christ*, Paul tells us (2 Corinthians 5:17) *there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!* God sees us as that *new creature* he is inviting us to become. God sees the possibilities and invites us into the knowledge of a new future in his love.

Let us with the Psalmist ask God to know us and reveal the person he is calling us to become. Let us rejoice in the personal, intimate God who made us, and loves us, and knows us far better than we know ourselves. Let us offer the last two verses of Psalm 139 together as a prayer: *Search me out, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my restless thoughts. Look well whether there be any wickedness in me and lead me in the way that is everlasting. Amen.*