

Psalm 139
September 8, 2013
Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church
In Celebration of Dorothy Schmuck's 100th Birthday

On the day Dorothy was born the big news of the day was a massive train crash outside of New Haven which killed over twenty people and injured dozens more. Harry Kendall Thaw, murderer of architect Stanford White was fighting extradition from Quebec having escaped from the Mattawan Hospital for the criminally insane. Thaw, jealous husband of famed show girl Evelyn Nesbitt, took exception to the affair his wife was having with White. He was acquitted of the murder by reason of insanity. Internationally there was rising concern about political instability in the Balkans of Eastern Europe which would in a few short years provide the excuse for the start of World War I. Much concern was being expressed about the health of the son of Tsar Nicholas of Russia who was receiving water bath treatments in Odessa. In Washington, debate was getting into full swing concerning a graduated income tax. In London, multi millionaire Andrew Carnegie gave a speech in favor of the tax remarking that it was time to get those millionaires to pay their full share.

On a less significant note, much to do was being generated by the proposed new policy of the New York Times that department managers dictate directly to stenographers using the new technology of typewriters. Letters to the editor seriously questioned the ability of such managers to dictate in complete sentences.

Unremarked by the press was the birth of a little girl who would live to see passenger trains nearly disappear, a second world war and numerous other conflict, the case of Harry Thaw turned into a popular novel and even more popular Broadway musical, the murder of the

Tsar and his family and the rise and fall of the soviet empire and, among other things the utter disappearance of the typewriter. These are simply anecdotes which do not begin to capture the technological change that baby, young girl, young working woman, wife, mother, grandmother, great grandmother has witnessed over the past century.

And yet I wonder, Dorothy, when all is said and done, does all of this really matter? What is the perspective of a life lived which in 1913 would have projected to be on average at most sixty-five years? In the midst of the changes what is it that holds a life together? What perspective does a remarkable and intellectually active woman gain from this length of view?

I was pleased when I saw that Psalm 139 was appointed for reading today. It is the voice of one who has lived a long time. It is the voice of one who has experienced life in all of its dimensions—a life that has known joy and disappointment, successes and failures, satisfaction and futility, well being and tragedy. It is a voice of one who has weathered many storms and who still stands and, if the writer, traditionally identified as King David, shares a similar character as Dorothy, he has through it all, retained a wry but genuine sense of humor.

But there is more here than the experience of life. In Psalm 139 we encounter one who senses on the very deepest level that his life is literally lived, *in God*. Indeed the writer could well agree with the Apostle Paul who speaks of the God “from whom we come, unto whom we return, and in whom we live and move and have our being.”

This is not the expression of a life which has kept account of every wrong and regret. He does not bewail all of his missed opportunities and defeats at the hands of those who were out to get him. Nor are there any “if onlys.” If only I had done this. If only I had married X instead of Y. If only I had studied harder or spent more time with my wife and children. This does not

mean that he has no regrets. But it does mean that the writer is far more impressed with God's presence through it all. He has lived life in God's company. He has experienced God as continuously seeking him out and helping him to know himself and God better. He has experienced God as present in his very worst moments when there was no light in his dark life. From the perspective of age, the writer is impressed not with God's distance but rather with his intimacy with all of his ways, God's understanding of all his thoughts. All of which leads him to exclaim with joy and awe at God's vast greatness.

And yet, as we hear in the final verses of the Psalm, the writer's passion and anger come through. Even from the perspective of wisdom, he had the fire of righteous anger. "O how I hate the wicked!" He has not conceded power to the oppression and injustice in the world. He has peace with God but not with evil.

Yet in the end, he returns to God who is the source of his life and humbly submits even his justified outrage to God's scrutiny.

I am moved and we are honored, Dorothy, that you allow us to celebrate with you this rare milestone. And we do not for a moment romanticize a life of one hundred years. But your presence here is the occasion for honest reflection. How do we want to feel on our 100th birthday if we be still alive and as alert and alive as you are? Do we want to be a catalogue of regrets and resentments? Or do we with you aspire to our aging years to be filled with the deep awareness that through all the highs and lows of life, triumphs and tragedies, we have lived in the presence of a God who in love seeks us and knows us; and who cares about our days and who promises to keep us on the way to life everlasting?

If that is our aspiration, then let us get serious about the journey now. Amen.

