

“WIRELESS: V – ONSTAR”

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Psalm 139: 1-18

Luke 15:1-7

One Sunday morning last October, the phone in my office here at church rang about 7:30 a.m. I picked it up and after I said “Elkton United Methodist Church,” the voice on the other end said, “Karen, it’s Betty Sprague.” Well, I wasn’t expecting to hear Betty’s voice, because I had been expecting to see her around that time. You see, it was Harvest Food Festival Day – the day when we bring bags full of groceries to be donated to the Immaculate Conception Church food pantry. Ed and Betty supply the truck from their business in which to put the groceries. So they always arrive early on Harvest Food Festival Day to get the truck lined up at the back door, and catch the people who arrive early.

So I had been fully expecting them to drive up to the back door at any moment, and then the phone call. (Let me tell you something – Sunday morning phone calls to the church are usually not good! It means somebody’s sick and can’t teach, or can’t sing, or play, or lead worship.)

Well, it wasn’t good! Just after Betty and Ed left their house down near Hart’s Church, as they were driving up the road, they had a run-in with a deer – a huge deer – who leapt up out of nowhere and before they knew it had slammed into the windshield of their SUV.

By the way, I got their permission to tell this story – and this is the story. They had just gotten started on their trip, headed up to their business to trade their car for the business truck, when, like I said, this great huge deer appeared out of nowhere from the side of the road, and landed smack on the windshield of their vehicle and then rolled off the front. The impact was so severe that the windshield was shattered and the air bags deployed – all of them, with a loud bang, and an incredible amount of smoke instantly filling the car.

Blessedly, Ed never lost control of the car. I think they were both stunned, but Ed managed to keep the car going straight until he could stop it. But here’s what I really wanted you to know about this morning. Before the car even came to a stop – just after the airbags deployed and Ed barely had had time to hit the brakes, a voice came on from OnStar. The woman said that they had had an indication that the airbags had deployed – did they need help? “Yes, indeed,” Betty replied. The voice came back – “The police are on their way. Do you need an

ambulance?” Ed and Betty were in such shock, that they didn’t know at that point, and said that, but the OnStar woman stayed on the line until they figured out that the smoke wasn’t a fire, but came from the airbags, and that they were both physically shaken, but okay. And the OnStar woman stayed on the line until the police arrived, and was ready to stay on there even longer, just to reassure them, but by then, the police had things under control, and Betty and Ed thanked her, and she clicked off.

Talk about protection? Now, just so you know, I don’t have OnStar in my car, and I’m not “a paid spokesperson” for OnStar, but you have to admit that’s pretty impressive, and sure makes you feel like someone’s watching out for you. You feel like, no matter what happens, you’re not alone, and it will be okay.

Well, you can see where I’m going with that metaphor this morning, in this last of the “Wireless” sermon series. If that’s not an apt description of God, I don’t know what is – someone watching out for you always, and no matter what, you’re not alone, and it will be okay.

In all of scripture, there may not be a better passage to describe those thoughts than the one from the Hebrew scriptures that you heard read this morning – the words of Psalm 139. Hear a few of them again:

“O Lord, you have searched me and known me.

You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts
from far away.

You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with
all my ways.

Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely . . .”

And on it goes – telling how from the beginning God was with us, while we were being knit together in our mothers’ wombs; how when we are close, God is with us; and when we wander, still He is with us. It is a beautiful psalm, and a powerful reminder of God’s love for each of us.

This morning, I want to run with the metaphor of OnStar a little more, by focusing on three things – and the first of those is, being known. Clearly, the woman from OnStar knew with whom she was speaking that morning. She knew the vehicle was owned by Betty and Ed Sprague, because I assume, paperwork was filled out for OnStar when they bought the vehicle.

God needs no paperwork, because He knows each of us through and through. One writer put it so beautifully when he said this: “God knows you. This is the God whose eye is on the sparrow. This is the God who keeps your tears in a bottle. This the God who took out the divine knitting needles and crocheted you together, stitch

by stitch, in your mother's womb. This is the God who tallies the number of every hair on your head . . .

This is the God for whom there are no anonymous sheep, to whom nobody is a write-off, for whom no one is lost in the crowd. The personal God who loves the number one: one lost sheep, one missing coin, one sinner lost and found."

(On-line, Faith and Leadership, "Hemmed In," Jeremy Troxler)

Isn't that beautiful, and oh, isn't it true? God knows us through and through, and loves us like no other. We are loved and worthy in His sight.

James Moore makes that point in the story he tells about a speaker who one night at a seminar held up a crisp, new \$20 bill. There were about 200 people in the room, and he asked them, "How many of you would like to have this \$20 bill?" Hands went up all over the place. The speaker continued, "I'm going to give this \$20 bill to one of you, but first let me do this." And he proceeded to crumple up the \$20 bill, and then he held it up, and asked, "Now, who wants it?" Hands still went up everywhere. "Well," he continued, "what if I do this?" And he dropped it onto the floor, stepped on it, and started to grind it into the floor with his shoe. Then he picked it up and held it for everyone to see. It was crumpled and smudged and dirty, and he asked, "Who wants it now?" Again, hands went up all over the place. Then the speaker said, "Friends, you have just learned a very valuable lesson. No matter what I did to the money, you still wanted it because it did not decrease in value. No matter how smudged and crumpled it became, it was still worth \$20."

Moore writes, "Many times in our lives, we get knocked around – dropped, crumpled, smudged, and ground into the dirt – by the decisions we make and the circumstances that come our way. And sometimes we feel as though we are worthless and used up and of no account. But no matter what has happened or what will happen, you will never lose your value in God's eyes. To God, dirty or clean, crumpled or finely creased, you are still priceless!" (James W. Moore, "Celebrating God's Healing Love, *If God Has a Refrigerator, Your Picture is on It*," p. 88.

He is so right, you are priceless, you are loved, you are known through and through by God Himself. Do you realize that? I hope you do. I pray that you do.

Secondly, how comforting to know that, like that woman from OnStar, God is right there with us in times of trouble. Before we even know it, just like before the Spragues' car had even come to a stop – before we even know it, God is there to help us through our struggles. He's there to help, and He'll do whatever it takes, go to the ends of the earth to rescue us. Remember the stories in the Gospel lesson – the passion with which the shepherd goes after the sheep that has wandered away into trouble; the urgency and intensity with which the woman searches for the lost coin; the joy of the sinner who comes out of trouble and comes home.

God is there for us when we need Him the most, in times of trouble, when we find ourselves lost, because of something that's happened to us, or something that we've brought on ourselves. God is there for us, to carry us through.

I remember reading once about a mother of a little child who was in the hospital. The child had been very critically ill and that mother never left his bedside. After some time, the child began to improve, and the doctor suggested to the mother that she go home and get some rest herself, but she wouldn't budge – as long as her child was struggling in any way, she would be right by his side. Sounds like God, doesn't it? As long as one of God's children struggles, God is there. The psalmist put it like this: "if I make my bed in Sheol, (in hell), you are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast. If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night,' even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you." (Psalm 139:8a-12)

I daresay there's not a person here who doesn't know about God being with you in time of trouble. For you, it might have been when you were stricken with illness; or maybe it was when you lost your job; or your spouse left you; or your child stopped talking to you. For many, it was when someone you loved died; for all of us, it has been when we've sinned and fallen short in some way. No matter what, God was there, walking with us through the sadness and struggle, holding on to us through the journey. And oh, knowing that matters so much – it matters knowing that someone is with you every step of the way – that you're not alone. You can get through anything, if you know you're not alone.

So first, God knows you; and second, God is with you in times of trouble. And thirdly, like the woman from OnStar who was willing to stay with the Spragues even after the trouble was over – so God is there after our struggles are over – and God celebrates that with us. Look again at the Gospel lesson and see the joy that the shepherd feels when all of the sheep are well and back where they belong; and look at the joy of the woman when she finds that lost coin; and the joy of a sinner who repents and finds the Lord!

God is with us through the struggles, and after the struggles, when things are good – and He is filled with joy for us, and continues to walk with us. I saw something very touching and wonderful on Facebook this week. Some of you, I know, saw it as well. It was a video of a dog and her master. Her master had been out of town for several months, and when he walked in the door that door literally was filled with joy. She jumped all over him, cried and whimpered, licked his face, couldn't get enough of him. It went on and on and on! It was so precious – you could feel that dog's heart bursting with happiness.

Don't you think God feels that way about us? Especially when we've come through trouble and gotten to the other side – especially when perhaps we've been

the source of our own trouble. How God loves us – and delights when life is good for us – delights to walk with us especially then!

Finally, I invite you to remember that the God who knows us through and through, not only walks with us in times of trouble, and not only rejoices with us when troubles are past, but He is with us every moment of every day of our lives. There is never a moment that we are away from His presence. We are never, ever alone. What a comfort to realize that in the midst of this world that leaves us lonely in so many ways. It can make all the difference in the way we face life everyday.

It made all the difference in the world to a man who came to visit the United States from Korea. He pastors a church there, and he came to the USA to study English. He likes to tell the story of his first day in our country. He says that he arrived at LAX, and his cousin was supposed to pick him up, but he got stuck in traffic. He got through customs, then emerged into this vast space filled with people speaking languages he didn't know. He was bewildered, confused and frightened, and hardly spoke a word of English. What was he going to do? How would he ever find his cousin in the crowd? He had no idea how to make a telephone call or find a taxi. He felt completely and totally alone in a very strange place. And then, he remembered that someone was with him in that crowd who knew him. God was there. God knew his name and was going to take care of him. And, as remembered that he calmed down - it was well with his soul - and he simply began walking around the terminal, and a while later, he looked up and there was his cousin waiting to take him to his home.

Friends, God is with us everyday. Knowing that makes a difference in how we face everyday. We are never alone, ever. The God who knows us like no other; the God who walks with us in our struggles and rejoices in our triumphs, is with us always.

May you and I remember that always, and give thanks for that. May we remember that God, as the hymn says, “was there to hear our boding cry, and will be there when we are old.” May we live each day enveloped in the love of God that knows us, and loves us, and never lets us go. May it be so. Amen.