

Fearfully & Wonderfully
Psalm 139:14
Faith You Can Fit in Your Pocket
March 18, 2018
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First, before we do anything, let's break this verse down a little.

Fearfully. In the original Hebrew, the word being used here connotes awe and reverence and deep honor. It's even used as a synonym for love.

So another way to translate that line might be, "I am created by an act of divine love."

Wonderfully. As professor of biblical languages Nancy deClaissé-Walford [writes](#), the Hebrew word means "different, striking, remarkable - outside of the power of human comprehension. The word is used repeatedly in the Psalter to describe the acts of God on behalf of humanity."

So another creative way to translate *that* line might be, "I am an act of divine intervention."

This line of scripture claims that each of us, each and every one of us is an unrepeatable, beautiful miracle.

Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.

Do we? Do we know that very well?

Do we *truly* know that God's works are wonderful, *including even ourselves*?

Now, I think it's a lot easier, understandably, to see evidence of God's works outside ourselves, beyond ourselves, surrounding ourselves. As I prepared to write this sermon this week, I was on the lookout for wonderfulness.

I saw it in this amazing photo of Annika Hoff, Northfield High School senior and child of First UCC, helping lead the girls' basketball team to one their many victories in their amazing run to state this last week. In the photo, Annika is captured mid-jump, ball in her hands, her face a picture of pure determination and focus, and she looks so strong and powerful.

I could not help but think when I saw that picture, Yes, there. She is fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are God's works. That I know very well.

I glimpsed the truth of our scripture again as I read obituaries of the late, great Stephen Hawking throughout the week. Now, Hawking was an avowed atheist, so I want to tread carefully in claiming him as part of God's beautiful creation. He said once that "God is not necessary" to explain the creation of the universe. I read that and thought, "I'm sure he's right. He certainly knows more about it than I do." But at the same time, the fact that Stephen Hawking's stunning mind ever *existed* in this world carves out the possibility for me, if not for him, that the mystery of God is real. I rest in that mystery, not defending it, not arguing for or against it, but simply appreciating the miracle of what human minds can do.

We are fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are God's works. That I know very well.

Then there were the school walkouts on Wednesday, here and all across our country, calling for more effective gun legislation to protect students in schools. In Northfield, the

walkouts were led by three great students, including First UCC's own Ann Beimers, a junior. Today's scripture echoed through my mind as I looked at pictures of our students, and students from schools near and far, and the thousands and thousands of empty shoes left on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, representing the over 7,000 children killed by gun violence since the Sandy Hook massacre in 2012. At the risk of putting words in young people's mouths, what I heard them saying was this:

We are fearfully and wonderfully made, and it is wrong that we can be violently unmade, in an instant, by an automatic weapon. We are more important than that. That we know very well.

In all these moments I just described to you, it was as if the scripture was trying to come to life, putting on the costume of everyday existence and saying, "Look!" I'll help you know me very well by showing you what I look like, in the flesh.

But then here's the hard part. It's one thing to recognize God's wonderful works *out there*. It's quite another to turn your eye inward, to trust that the same truth applies to you. That you were made of the same stuff.

I think this is a moment where our tendency to anthropomorphize God—to assume that God behaves as humans do—does not serve us well. It does not serve us well perhaps because, deep down, we cannot begin to imagine the radical certainty of God's love. *Human* love we *can* imagine, and we know perfectly well that it can be fraught, messy, inconsistent, and can never be perfect. And so, deep down, we still suspect that we need to *earn* God's love by always being at our best, or even that God might decide we're too much work and give up on us.

What if we're not good enough?

What if we're too shameful?

Too unlovable?

Too far gone?

Too lost?

There's no such thing in God's realm. Remember: *we are fearfully and wonderfully made*. An act of love beyond human comprehension. God's love isn't meant to make sense. God's love isn't meant to be contingent. It's only meant to *be*. And so we are left to consider, to self-reflect, to open ourselves to the very thought of it.

Yes, we can mess up. We can age. We can change. We can break. We can lose our abilities, physical, mental. We can do everything right, and we can do everything wrong. All those external things, they are important, obviously; they are real, they impact us, and others.

But beneath those layers of experience, we're invited by our sacred tradition to trust that there is a core, a heart, a soul (perhaps?) that God created and recreates, all the time. And God loves that essence of us through it all. No matter who we are.

If we believe that—if we really believe it—think what we can do. Think what we can feel empowered to do for the sake of the world. When we believe that we are beloved, when we know that we are fearfully and wonderfully made, we start doing things less out of shame and fear and more out of a desire to show others the same assurance we have been shown.

This is way easier said than done. I don't think you wake up one day convinced that you are part of God's good creation. It's especially hard right now; our mainstream culture is swept up in discourse about race, gender, and sexuality, with mixed messages flying around. Who is good enough? What is good enough? Meanwhile, we treat our planet as we often treat ourselves and each other: abusively.

Our faith can help us make a necessary paradigm shift. Our faith can help us say, “We are not separate from God, nor are we separate from creation. Neither are our enemy. We are all in this together, for better or for worse.”

John Seed, director of the Rainforest Information Centre in Australia, was asked one day, “You talk about the struggle against the lumber companies and politicians to save the remaining rainforests. How do you deal with the despair?”

He replied, “I try to remember that it’s not me, John Seed, trying to protect the rainforest. Rather, I am part of the rainforest protecting itself. I am that part of the rain forest recently emerged into human thinking.”

Yet another way of saying, *I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are God’s works. That I know very well.*

How will you know it, this week?

Amen.