

28<sup>th</sup> June 2023

## Prayer

**“Prayer is not an asking.  
It is a longing of the soul.  
It is the daily admission of one’s weaknesses.”**

Mahatma Gandhi, *Young India* (1926)

Every day in Iona Abbey, one of the Psalms is read responsively as part of the morning liturgy. Today I am inspired to reflect on Psalm 139.

I suspect (though I’d have to do further research to confirm my intuitions) that Psalm 139 has been one of the most paraphrased of the Psalms over the centuries. I was brought up on the Psalms. Selected verses of Psalms (such as 139 from the “Scottish Psalter” with its twenty-four verses) would be sung to a variety of tunes, accessed in a “split-page” Psalter, and often unaccompanied. In more modern times, versions of parts of the Psalms by John L Bell, Bernadette Farrell, Ian Pitt-Watson and others have continued to provide us with depth, insight and prayerfulness.

I’ve always loved Psalm 139. Read or spoken, sung in an old or modern style, it is my prayer, confirming for me Gandhi’s affirmation quoted above. Whatever prayer is, it is a time of immersing myself in a holy presence, giving myself to a “longing of the soul”, recognising my weaknesses, and often leaving it at that. Psalm 139 takes me to that place.

Not surprisingly, I’ve had my turn at paraphrasing this Psalm. My version is written to be sung to Bach’s lovely melody *Ich Halte Treulich Still* – a prayer, with or without music, I’ve offered again in Iona Abbey today.

To you, my God, I come; to you, my God, I turn.

To you I offer up my praise; from you I seek to learn.

You know me when I rise; you understand my ways.

You hear my words before I speak and bless me all my days.

I cannot hide from you wherever I would go.

I find you when I rise to heaven, and when I’m cast down low.

Not on the morning’s wings, nor in the darkest night,  
Will you withdraw your heavenly love or hide your guiding light.

You knew me ev’n before I saw the light of day.

You shaped and formed my life as in my mother’s womb I lay.

Search me, and know my heart; test me, and know my thoughts,

That I might live as you would choose and love you as I ought.

### **A prayer for today**

*No need for anything else today. The Psalmist’s prayer will do just fine! Amen, and amen!*

*An original reflection © Tom Gordon*

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