

## **“God of the Poets”**

### **Sermon Reflections on Sunday, August 24, 2025**

Dear church,

This morning, I would like to highlight a genre in the Bible that is often overlooked: poetry. We are probably a bit more familiar with the storytelling of the gospel writers or longwinded arguments in the letters of Paul, the Ten Commandments, the fiery “Thus says the Lord” of the prophets but there is also lots of poetry in our Book of Faith. The psalms are deeply poetic. My favorite passage out of God’s poetry book is from Psalm 139.

*Where can I go from your Spirit?*

*Where can I flee from your presence?*

*<sup>8</sup> If I go up to the heavens, you are there;  
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.*

*<sup>9</sup> If I rise on the wings of the dawn,  
if I settle on the far side of the sea,*

*<sup>10</sup> even there your hand will guide me,  
your right hand will hold me fast.*

*<sup>11</sup> If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me  
and the light become night around me,”*

*<sup>12</sup> even the darkness will not be dark to you;  
the night will shine like the day,  
for darkness is as light to you.*

That sounds a little bit better than just saying that God is with you all the time, even when you are depressed, which is what it essentially says. These words give so much more texture and hopeful, loving imagery to the same notion. And we are invited to expand on that poetry in our own words. “Even if I go to planet Mars, God you are there!” “Even if my family falls apart, God, you have us covered.”

There is also poetry in our holy book that we don’t notice because it has been lost in translation. Psalm 119, better known as the longest psalm of the Bible with 176 verses, is a poetic gem. We just don’t know about it because most people don’t have access to its original Hebrew word structure. In the Hebrew text, there are 22 paragraphs of eight verses each, one paragraph for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In precise order! The first paragraph begins with the first letter of the alphabet, the second paragraph begins with the second letter of the alphabet and so on. The psalm is boring; it’s all about praise for the Law of God, 176 times praise for the Torah. The same over and over again in slightly different words. But the structure is genius. It tells us that there is an order in this world even when we sometimes feel that utter chaos reigns. Poetry, even in the law!

Some of the other books that contain powerful poetic images are... Job for instance. Job is in an existential battle with God and is mourning everything he had before his life was met by misfortune and disintegrated. He has gone from being rich to poor, from healthy to near-death sick, from having many friends to having just a few faithful souls. He forms hauntingly beautiful words that describe his despair and the apparent unfairness of life.

“Why is life given to a man  
whose way is hidden,  
whom God has hedged in?  
<sup>24</sup> For sighing has become my daily food;  
my groans pour out like water.  
<sup>25</sup> What I feared has come upon me;  
what I dreaded has happened to me.  
<sup>26</sup> I have no peace, no quietness;  
I have no rest, but only turmoil.”

Then there is the Song of Songs, a book attributed to King Salomon. It's a collection of love poetry. The images portray a different culture and time, but we still get it. Because poetry, even when it uses older images, often transcends time.

*Your eyes behind your veil are doves.  
Your hair is like a flock of goats  
descending from the hills of Gilead.  
<sup>2</sup> Your teeth are like a flock of sheep just shorn,  
coming up from the washing.  
Each has its twin;  
not one of them is alone.  
<sup>3</sup> Your lips are like a scarlet ribbon;  
your mouth is lovely.  
Your temples behind your veil  
are like the halves of a pomegranate.*

“Your hair is like a flock of goats...” Not exactly what I would say to my wife, but isn't it nice to know that the Bible is a book of Life where love poetry has its own place?

And so, in a time when the dogmas of the church are not resonating with people anymore, it may be time for the poets to show up and lead us to a new understanding of our faith, a deeper understanding, in an open and curious way of understanding, embracing the spiritual dimension, listening anew and finding words that speak to the people of our time. God of the poets, come and speak to us! People, open your hearts.

**Amen.**

