



WEEKLY STUDY October 1-7, 2023

(Use this guide to individually or with a group dive deeper into this week's sermon.)

Wisdom to Live By

Our sermon series for October is: Wisdom to Live By: A Series on Wisdom Literature and Lived Experience. What wisdom does the Bible instill in us? What are the best pieces of advice we have been given about faith and life? This month we are going to both discover insight for our journey in Psalms, Proverbs, and Job – and hear the life experiences and learnings from our congregation members. As we read, listen, and reflect, we will gain wisdom to live by.

Our scripture this week is: Psalm 1

“Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night.

That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither – whatever they do prospers. Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.”

- 1)** Sunday, October 1, included two very important celebrations in our congregation. We, along with Christian churches around the world, observe World Communion Sunday on the first Sunday of October every year. Erin Seay-Taylor spoke at both services about the importance of communion. Erin reminded us that the communion table is the Lord's table. It's not Belle Meade UMC's. It's not the United Methodist Church's. It's God's table and all are welcome. And we were reminded of the world-wide nature of sharing bread and drink at God's table by the varieties of bread and the colorful cloths on the communion table. I was privileged to produce a video on World Communion through United Methodist Communications. One thing I included in that video was how World Communion started. It was the 1930's and a time when people felt without hope, people felt divided. This idea sprang out of a Presbyterian church: “we need a Sunday where all who are Christian gather at the communion table and remember how we are

one.” With that idea, World Communion Sunday was born. As we move into our wisdom study, part of the wisdom that we gain from tradition is the importance of and message of gathering for drink and bread, remembering Jesus, and understanding that we don’t own God’s table. God’s table is wider, and bigger, and more inclusive than many of us can imagine.

Question: Reflect on the meaning of World Communion Sunday. What is most meaningful for you? What messages do you feel we need to take from communion and carry with us day by day?

- 2) This Sunday was also an important Sunday for Belle Meade UMC as a faith community. Once again we carried on the tradition of presenting Bibles to our third graders. This is a common practice in The United Methodist Church. Pastor Gracie explained that this is done for third graders as a recognition that they now have the reading ability to begin reading the Bible for themselves. And like all traditions, it’s a uniting one since many adults recall when they received their first Bible from the church they attended in childhood. As part of the service of presenting the Bibles, in our congregational response, we all joined in saying, “We pray that as you read the Bible, you will bring not only your faith but also your questions, your doubts and your hopes to our church family to find a loving, supportive, listening, and teaching community. We want to grow with you in faith and knowledge.”

Question: Consider the words we as the congregation said to the children. How well are you doing these things yourselves? What practices have you found to help you with regular Bible reading and regular Bible discussing – with affirmations, doubts, questions, and listening for what God’s message might be at this particular time and in this particular place?

- 3) Our series on Wisdom began with the reading of Psalm 1. Pastor Sam stated that Sunday’s psalm is an invitation to receive wisdom and to begin sharing your insight on faith and life. She stated that it sets forth 2 paths: one is a posture of constant openness to God’s instruction and the other is a posture of arrogantly rejecting God’s instruction. I do think it is important to note it is God’s instruction we are to be open to. There are plenty of human beings who are presenting their own instruction as God’s instruction. And as people of faith we are to question, research, and join in exploration of what is of God and what is not. Sam used a quote from John Calvin, one of the theologians of the reformation who wrote, “God, by a sudden conversion, subdued and brought my mind to a teachable frame.”

Question: What are the elements of a posture of openness to God’s instruction that will bring your mind to a teachable frame?

- 4) Part of what we are seeking with October’s theme is wisdom from scripture. The other part is wisdom from the living experiences of those in our faith community. Pastor Sam told of being on retreat with several women from Belle Meade UMC. She talked about a way of seeking wisdom that Maribeth had adopted for her own life. She set as a goal to read all of the Bible in one year. It has taken her two years (a lesson for us all to

persevere even if we have to change our timeline!). In conversation with Maribeth, she told Sam she was surprised to discover what she thought would be the big themes of scripture were not. She said as she read she heard the themes of generosity and hospitality and Sabbath. This led her to ask Sam why we don't take seriously the importance of Sabbath. This means setting aside busyness and taking time to study, to pray, to observe, to appreciate, to rest. Pastor Sam said through practicing sabbath we gain access to the Kingdom way: community; connection to God, self, others, the world itself.

Question: In what ways can you embrace the wisdom of practicing sabbath?

Prayer: (As we begin this month focused on wisdom, I invite you into a prayer of pondering. Settle yourself into an attitude of prayer – of talking and listening with God. Use the following Psalm to center yourself in the word of God. Read it slowly and out loud. Then sit in silence considering this wisdom for you life today.)

**“My people, mark my teaching (Torah),
Listen to the words I am about to speak.
I shall tell you a meaningful story;
I shall expound the riddle of things past,
Things that we have heard and know,
Things our forefathers have recounted to us.
They were not hidden from their descendants,
Who will repeat them to the next generation:
The praiseworthy acts of the LORD
And the wonders he has done. (Psalm 78:1-4)**

Weekly Challenges: This week pray for the third graders in our congregation as they open up their new Bibles and begin to read for themselves. Set a goal of daily reading from one of the Wisdom books of the Bible (Ecclesiastes; Proverbs; Job) for the month of October.

(Weekly study guide prepared by Rev. MaryJane Pierce Norton)