



WEEKLY STUDY October 8-14, 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: Proverbs 3:1-10

“My sons, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart,
For they will prolong your life many years and bring you peace and prosperity.
Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck,
Write them on the tablet of your heart.
Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man.
Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding;
In all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.
Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil.
This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones.
Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops;
Then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.

- 1)** Our series on Wisdom began the first Sunday in October 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. Last week we explored, "Wisdom from Nature" and were reminded of the importance of all creation in reflecting God's presence. This week Marshall Brown was our lay speaker. In the United Methodist Church, we rely on four things to help us in our decision making and in the ways we live our lives: Scripture, Tradition, Experience, Reason. Through his message, Marshall talked about his lifetime of experiences in seeking to follow God and to nurture his faith. He gave us a good

example of how our individual experiences inform the decisions we make daily in response to God's love.

Question: What is one of the key experiences in your life that has served to form how you love God and love neighbor through your decisions and actions?

- 2) One of the themes running through this weeks service was the meaning of the cross. The opening hymn in second service was "Lift High the Cross." Every time we sing this, I think to the times I have attended the United Methodist General Conference. This song is the song sung for opening worship where, following the one carrying the cross, all the Bishops from all over the world file in to worship. For me it is always a reminder of the broad reach of the Christian faith. In the message for children, Pastor Gracie called attention to the cross at the front of the church and the crosses found in the windows in the sanctuary. She told the children the cross serves as reminder that God love us so much that God sent Jesus to teach us and guide and us help us know how to show and share God's love. During his message, Marshall talked about the meaning of the cross – and the turning of the cross from a weapon of torture and death used by the Romans to control people to a message of Jesus' resurrection and life. The history of the cross is problematic. Using the cross for fear and death did not stop with the Romans. And it is still used today to instill fear and harm in those who some would deem unworthy of God's love. And yet it is still a symbol of great beauty and and a witness to God's love for humankind.

Question: Consider the many messages of the cross. What do you think when you consider the cross?

- 3) Just as in the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes we have collections of wise sayings, or wise advice, Marshall Brown's message was filled with wisdom he has leaned into from scripture through his life. Three things I noted as he spoke were: 1) The Practice of Extravagant Hospitality; 2) the importance of giving; 3) the hard life experiences (his aneurism) that change us and place us among others who have suffered life-altering experiences.

Question: What were some of the words of wisdom you gained from Marshall's message? In particular, how did you respond to the three listed above related to your own walk in faith?

- 4) As Marshall, he didn't dodge away from hard issues in our culture. He stated the need to address gun violence, the need for inclusion of all people, the need in particular for women to regain the ability to have health issues be between them and their doctors instead of the source for legislation. His frank discussion and his invitation to others to discuss with him these issues of how we live our lives as Christians goes back to John Wesley. One of the means of grace listed by Wesley is "Christian Conferencing." This one of the reasons we have as part of our organization un the UMC, Charge Conference, Annual Conference, General Conference. But more importantly it's why small groups are built into the DNA of being Methodist. We are to come together, to study together, to ask questions together, to listen to each other in order to grow in faith.

Question: Where are you able to have the hard conversations related to faith and to living out God's call in your life?

Prayer: (This week's prayer is the prayer of Affirmation from Sunday's service).

God of Wonder, open our eyes that we may have the vision to see the world the way you do. Open our ears that we may listen to the Spirit calling us into community. Open our hearts that we may love without hesitation. Open our hands that we may give from the very depths of ourselves. Open us, O Source of Wisdom, that we would embrace the call of the church and be your presence in the world. AMEN

Weekly Challenges: Set a goal of daily reading from one of these Wisdom books of the Bible (Ecclesiastes; Proverbs; Job) for the month of October. Pastor Gracie, in Children's Time, invited the children to open their eyes this week and to look around to see daily what (and who) teaches us about God. This week, at the end of each day, reflect for yourself on what you saw that reminded you to love God and love others.

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