

Sunday, September 20, 2015, 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Call to Worship (please see bulletin)

Prayer of the Day

Sovereign God, we look at the things You have made, the works of Your hands, and we stop to consider them with awe. From the intricate immensity of the universe to the specific singularity of a flower, Your works astonish us. Who are we mortals that You pay attention to us? We wonder at your love for us and rejoice in your presence, praying in the name of the Creator, the Christ and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Call to Confession

It is tempting to gloss over our sin and focus on our strengths, but God calls us to focus on the strength of Christ, not ourselves. God, who is faithful and just, offers us a new way to live, and so we join together to confess our faults and failings. Let us pray.

Prayer of Confession (please see bulletin)

We pray in the name of the One who emptied himself in order to live your will. **Amen.**

Assurance of Forgiveness

Hear and live this good news: Love could not be contained in the tomb and will not be constrained by our understanding! Christ is risen, bringing forgiveness and hope to all people. **Alleluia! Amen!**

Proverbs 31 Responsive p ____ of pew Bible

Prayers of the People

Lord, you have been our dwelling place for all generations. We thank you that through all times, in thick and thin, you have walked beside your church, guiding us by your Son Jesus, your Word made Flesh, your Wisdom.

Walk with us today, renewing us by your Spirit O Lord. Teach us, we pray, to use the gifts you have given us, the compassion and hope that you have taught, so we might bear your light and hope. Teach us, that we may teach others about your good news.

This day we lift up Tom as he prepares for surgery tomorrow. Be with Jean as she stands by him. We ask that you guide the work of his surgeons and surgery team that he find healing quickly.

We also ask the same for Rudy, who's surgery on his eye had to be delayed another week. Please give him grace and patience as he waits, and gets ready to head for surgery in Santa Fe. Be with his wife, and be with Teresa who must remain here at home to await news of the outcome.

We continue praying for Bruce, and his wife Peggy, as they watch and wait for his progress in the Long term care facility.

Thank you O Lord, for the cooler temperatures outside. We glory in the arrival of fall.

And we now take a moment in time to lift up our many other prayers to you in silence.

God you have been our dwelling place for all generations. Your eternal presence is worthy of all praise, honor and glory, forever and ever. We pray all this in the name of the one who walked among us, heals us, and teaches us to pray, saying, "Our Father, who art in heaven...Amen."

TIME OUT FOR TEACHING: Bible Genres - Wisdom

The Bible is not just one big book. It is a collection of many books spanning thousands of years, containing many kinds of writings. Today I want to start a new series of teachings to introduce us to those different kinds of writings, which we call "genres." There are numerous genres: letters, healing stories, parables, and today I would like to tell you about Wisdom Literature. We've heard a lot from the Wisdom Literature traditions lately, particularly Proverbs and James.

Wisdom is certainly important to us. If we have anything that we consider God's Word, then we can bet that in there should be wisdom.

A lot of similarity in Solomon's proverbs to ancient Sumerian and Egyptian proverbs as early as 2400 BC, but also they are similar to what we have seen from Egypt

Wisdom literature like what we have in our Bible was not unusual throughout the Ancient Near East, from Egypt to Mesopotamia. Many of it is structured similarly, such as stereophonically, which means saying the same truth in two ways.

So what's the point of taking note when we recognize we are reading "wisdom literature?" Well, why would someone take pains to write down what they felt were wise sayings? To pass on knowledge and wisdom. To provide us with insight on how to live the good life, the ethical life, life that God wants us to lead.

So whenever you pick up your Bible, and you find something that looks like a wise saying, pay attention! It was written for the very purpose to teach you something.

Prayer for Illumination

Composer of life,
may the words of Scripture serenade us
like lyrics begging for a response...
may the catchy melody of creation
ring through these words, inviting us into the dance of new life...
and may the beat of your heart
keeps us in perfect rhythm with your vision for the world.
Amen.

James 3:13-4:3, 7-8A

¹³Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. ¹⁴But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. ¹⁵Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. ¹⁶For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. ¹⁷But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. ¹⁸And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

^{4:1}Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? ²You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask. ³You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures.

⁷Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.

Mark 9:30-37

³⁰They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; ³¹for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again." ³²But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

³³Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" ³⁴But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. ³⁵He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them,

"Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." ³⁶Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷"Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

Sermon: Teacher's Pet

This past Tuesday, as I waited for the yoga class to arrive at the church, I heard the voice of a child outside. And when one of the participants came into the church, I asked her, "Did I hear voices outside?" "Oh a little kid and his mom were walking by. And they saw me walking into the church and he asked me, 'is that your house?'"

I love the way kids think. We often are amazed at the mind of a child, and chuckle to ourselves at their curiosity and questions.

Children during Jesus' time were seen not as people, but as blank slates, waiting to be written upon. For the most part, children were seen more like objects or property, and even the Greek word for "small child" was sometimes used synonymously to mean a slave. Kids were seen not as full persons, but at the same time, families saw them as the keys to a future, the chance to perpetuate their bloodline. So they were important, but not exactly fully human.

So it is perfectly ironic that when the disciples have been arguing about who was the greatest, that Jesus would bring forward a small child to teach them a lesson.

Picture this, Jesus has been in the process of foretelling his suffering and death to the disciples. And strangely enough, the disciples start arguing over who is the greatest. Who among them is the "Teacher's Pet," so to speak. It might seem uncouth, or insensitive of them to argue amongst themselves if they have heard their Teacher predict his own terrible death. But in their defense, I guess it's natural that if you think your great leader is about to die, you prepare yourself, by figuring out who is the greatest, who is worthy to take his place. Hence the argument.

Just to sympathize with the disciples for a moment, it must have been scary for them, to hear Jesus talk like that. They were reacting out of fear.

We have a lot in common with those disciples. I don't see any of you arguing over who's the greatest, but I do see times when we grieve the loss of another great mind in the church. With that grief is fear of who will be next to take up their mantle. The Rummage Sale is one of those reminders. Every time we work it, we feel the absence of another person. Once many women worked at it, the rest of the congregation just knew it was a wonderful event here and we were all so proud of those women who made sure it happened each year. But the last couple of years I am sure it has felt like that Rummage Sale Team has shrunk an awful lot.

We're not alone in this. Churches all across this nation have been grieving the loss of the great minds that led them, and the programs they grew, and the great wisdom they had.

But I'm here to tell you, don't be afraid. The great wisdom of the saints isn't gone away altogether. We've still got it. Jesus calls his disciples, including us, to resist worrying about who's the greatest, and realize whoever has great wisdom, it's time they shared their wisdom with the least of these. And to do so without embarrassment. Those of you with experience, it's time to share your knowledge, we hunger for it. Those of us who need it we have to humble ourselves so we can listen up!

And what the church can do is embrace its calling as a mother to the people, to teach the blank slates, to welcome those God sends us who are teachable, and to pray for God's peace, wisdom and gentleness that it takes to be teachers of something and students of something else.

I think this is why Jesus brought out the small child. In fact, the word for small child "paidion," is the same word root we have for "pedagogy." Pedagogy is the technical word that is used in the field of Education. If you ask a teacher, "What is your pedagogy?" the teacher can

explain her approach to teaching, how she gets kids to learn. So, in this way, Jesus reminds the disciples of their jobs: to welcome and teach even the least of these, who are children in the faith, big and small.

Friends, we have a lot to learn. Like those disciples who are still learning what Jesus meant by certain things, we have to humble ourselves to his words. But we also have a lot we can teach to those God sends us. People who have never learned how it feels to be simply welcomed in Jesus' name. People who have never learned the meaning of forgiveness. People who are perhaps new to just how things get done around this church. We have much to teach and much to learn. We should be celebrating this amazing chance, while we've still got it. Thanks be to God for the adventure before us! God is with us. Amen.