



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: Psalm 19

“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge.
They have no speech, they use not words; no sound is heard from them.
Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.
In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun. It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, like a champion rejoicing to run his course.
It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is deprived of its warmth.
The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul.
The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple.
The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart.
The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes.
The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever.
The decrees of the Lord are firm, and all of them are righteous.
They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold;
They are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb.
By them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward.
But who can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults.
Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me.
Then I will be blameless, innocent of great transgression.

- 1) Our series on Wisdom began last Sunday 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. This week's sermon, "Wisdom from Nature" reminds us of the importance of all creation in reflecting God's presence. Re-read Psalm 19. Consider what it says to us about nature and the glory of God.

Question: What in nature reveals God to you?

- 2) This Sunday in early service, Anne Brunette, and in second service, Dianne Wild, members of our congregation, were invited to share their wisdom. Anne, a retired art teacher who taught at St. Cecilia, told us, in teaching her students, she always reminded them that learning to draw is about learning to see. She spoke of how closely observing the world around us has helped her feel close to God. And she spoke about the dependability of the changing seasons. Anne shared with us a photo collage she created of a tree. She took the photos over the period of a year, reflecting on each season. She ended saying, this has been a constant reminder for her that spring will always follow winter. Dianne told of sitting at the lake, hiking in the woods, hearing the wind blow, seeing the leaves fall, and commented, "I don't know how anyone could not believe in God when being in nature." She also reflected on the seasons of the year and stated she was now in her last season of life. Her name for what some call "The Golden Years" was "The Rust Years" and told of how she has been contemplating what she is to do in this last season of life. She ended with a quote from President Jimmy Carter, "I have one life and one chance to make it count or something. My faith demands that I do whatever I can, wherever I may be, for as long as I can, with whatever I have to try to make a difference." Both gave us wise words.

Question: Consider the words of wisdom given to us by Anne and by Dianne. What message do you take from their talks and claim (or re-claim) for your life?

- 3) Pastor Sam stated in Sunday's sermon that – with Psalm 19 – we are reminded that Nature reveals the character of God and illumines scripture. Our task, she said is to look up, pay attention, be still. Through nature we gain knowledge and insight. Sam spoke about the healing in nature -through herbs, through sunlight; through forest bathing, through reflection on what we see, hear, feel, smell, taste in nature.

Question: In what ways has nature brought healing to you?

- 4) Pastor Sam talked about two other aspects of nature. She told how nature teaches us to slow down and soak in life. And in doing so, we learn how to live freely and lightly. Sam also reminded us that nature triggers us to be in wonder and in awe. My first teaching experience was when I was a graduate student at Scarritt. I was part of the teaching team for the three-year-olds at the preschool run by Scarritt. One of the lessons I learned from those three-year-olds was how awe and wonder was a part of every day. Life is so new and there are so many things to see and experience and explore. And the way their faces would light up and their bodies would respond to falling leaves or

butterflies fluttering by or the first flowers in the garden was a reminder of the miracles of life that surround us. Sam quoted from Paul's prayer recorded in Ephesians 3: "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine....to him be all the glory." She then said nature reminds us of this – if we go outside; look around; see what the heavens declare and the skies proclaim.

Question: What has most recently brought you to a state of awe and wonder?

Prayer: (This week's prayer is an adaptation of our Affirmation of Faith from Sunday's service).

O God, let us learn from nature that everything has a season: planting, growing, blooming, and dying. We thank you for each season. We are reminded that even with the harshest winter, spring always comes. And we give you thanks for this constant. Help us learn from the water that life is fluid, in constant motion, and requires our flexibility. Help us claim stillness as an opportunity to stop, listen, and regain clarity about our life, our decisions, our actions. May we be reminded that transformation starts with a spark. Give us patience to discover the passion that dwells within us. Keep us attentive, O Creator God, to all the lessons that creation has to teach us about being loved by you, about delighting in you, and about embracing our true selves. At this time and in all ways, we proclaim your glory, O God. And we ask for your continuing guidance so that we may live confidently as reflections of your divine image. 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. Give thanks to God for the children who were baptized this Sunday: William Paty Barksdale; Lilian Monroe Letorney and Beckham Pierce Letorney. And for our new members: Shellie and Jarrett Letorney. And this week – go outside. Look around. Linger in silence. Breathe deeply. What does the world proclaim to you?

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